

A Religion for Today

by

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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Preface | 4 |
| Part I. Introduction | 7 |
| Section 1. Rationale..... | 7 |
| The Proposal is Suspect (and, Besides, Our Society Will Soon Collapse) | 7 |
| But We <i>Already Have</i> Christianity as a New Testament Religion | 9 |
| We Need <i>Less</i> Religion, Not <i>More</i> | 9 |
| Part II: The Principles Underlying the New Religion..... | 15 |
| Section 2. Virtues | 15 |
| Section 3: Alternate State of Consciousness | 27 |
| Section 4. Participatory Meetings | 37 |
| Discovering Participatory Church Meetings..... | 37 |
| Historical Background of Church Meetings | 37 |
| Spiritual Gifts in Church Meetings..... | 38 |
| Mutual Exhortation in Church Meetings | 43 |
| One Anothering in Church Meetings..... | 44 |
| Joint Sharing in Church Meetings | 46 |
| Historical Decline of Church Meetings | 46 |
| Our Journey in Implementing Participatory Meetings | 47 |
| Conclusion | 49 |
| Now for <i>My</i> Contribution: | 49 |
| Introductory Comments | 49 |
| Can Meeting With Other Jesuans Be of Value?..... | 54 |
| Are Church “Services” Worth Attending?..... | 60 |
| An Alternate Type of Meeting for Jesuans | 62 |
| Section 5. Future Orientation..... | 66 |
| Can We Beat Global Warming?..... | 67 |
| Global Warming Per Se | 68 |
| Global Warming’s Implication for Us Humans | 71 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| Responding to the Threat | 74 |
| The Chart | 74 |
| Explanatory Comments..... | 75 |
| Critical Comments..... | 79 |
| Conclusions | 82 |
| A “Pre-Summary” | 85 |
| Part III: The New Religion | 86 |
| Section 6. Introductory Comments | 86 |
| Section 7. The Religion: Nature and Expected Outcomes | 91 |
| Preliminaries | 92 |
| Guiding Principles..... | 95 |
| Expected Outcomes | 97 |
| Outcomes: Generic Approach | 98 |
| Outcomes: Genetic Approach | 102 |
| Some Additional Thoughts | 108 |
| Appendix..... | 111 |
| Group Formation | 111 |
| Part IV: Conclusions | 113 |
| Section 8. Conclusion: “Always Reforming” | 113 |

Preface

Let me begin here by noting that the religion proposed herein is rather *non-sectarian* in character. That is, the *character* of the religion is such, I believe, that it could attract people with a background in virtually *any* religion (and, specifically, those *dissatisfied* with their religion), and even potentially attract people with little or no background in a religion.

Nicholas Wade has correctly stated that “New religions can only emerge out of old ones,”¹ and in my case the “old one” is Christianity. Like [Thomas Jefferson](#), I cannot help the fact that I was born into a *society* within which Christianity is, and has been, the dominant religion; nor did I choose to be born to *parents* who were raised in Christianity, and who therefore raised *me* in Christianity.

But, like Thomas Jefferson—who famously created the “[Jefferson Bible](#)”—I have long had problems with Christianity; and, like my parents—who left the denomination of Christianity in which *they* had been raised and, with some other couples, started a church of a *different* Christian denomination—I am herein *proposing* (but not actually *initiating*—unlike what my parents did) something rather similar. The difference between what *I* am doing here and what my *parents* did is that my *parents* were content to substitute one denomination of Christianity for another, whereas *I* feel a need to go *beyond* that by proposing a *new religion entirely*.

Of necessity, that new religion has its *basis* in Christianity, of course, given that my background is in that religion. Specifically, in fact, the new religion has its basis in the *New Testament*—and particularly in *aspects* of the New Testament that strike me as of especial importance for *today*. Given that latter fact, the new religion has features that differentiate it from any of the existing Christian denominations. In fact, so different (in *my* mind, at any rate) is the new religion from any *existing* Christian denomination that I insist on referring to it as simply a *new religion*—and in a later section (Section 6) refer to it as “NeWFism” (for reasons specified in that later section), and then discuss the new religion in Section 7.

It [has been said](#) of Thomas [Jefferson](#) that:

Jefferson cut and pasted pieces of the New Testament together to compose [The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth](#) (the “Jefferson Bible”), which excluded any [miracles](#) by Jesus and stressed his moral message. Though he often expressed his opposition to clergy and to Christian doctrines, Jefferson repeatedly expressed his belief in a deistic god and his admiration for [Jesus as a moral teacher](#). Opposed to [Calvinism](#), [Trinitarianism](#), and what he identified as [Platonic elements in Christianity](#), in private letters Jefferson variously refers to himself as “Christian” (1803),^[5] “a sect by myself” (1819),^[6] an “[Epicurean](#)” (1819),^[7] a “[Materialist](#)” (1820),^[8] and a

¹ [The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why it Endures](#). New York: The Penguin Press, 2009, p. 283.

"Unitarian by myself" (1825).^[9] Historian [Sydney E. Ahlstrom](#) associated Jefferson with "[rational religion](#)" or deism.^[10]

My interest here, however, is not in creating a "[Thompson Bible](#)"² to be a companion to the "Jefferson Bible." Rather, it is to propose a *new religion*, one having its basis in the New Testament of the Christian Bible—i.e., the [version of which](#) I have been exposed to as a *Protestant*. To be more specific, what I propose here is a new religion *inspired* by the New Testament portion of my Bible³ (along with my *other* reading, my educational background, my life experiences, etc.).

The word "inspired" in the above paragraph is significant in that my aim here is not so much to create a new religion that reflects the New Testament "*objectively*" but, rather, to create a new religion as one who (a) reads that collection of books as a person living in the *twenty-first century* (b) looking for ideas having *current relevance*. I cannot emphasize enough the importance of these two criteria as the guidelines that I have used in creating NeWFism. I should perhaps add here that one implication of my use of these criteria is that ***I do not believe it at all useful to perceive the books constituting the New Testament as conveying historical information.***⁴ Perceiving the New Testament as an accurate account of historical events leads one to disputes with others concerning the factuality of those events, thereby leading to feelings of rancor—and also, quite possibly, to feelings of uncertainty regarding the basis of one's beliefs.

Perceiving the New Testament as "merely" a collection of books from which ideas can be gleaned is not only more *fruitful*, but helps one avoid the aforementioned feelings—feelings that not only have negative implications for one's relationships with others, but negative implications for one's own mental health.

If, on the one hand, I think of myself as having been "[authored](#)" by the Bible,⁵ I have, on the other hand, also—of course—been influenced by many other factors as well (my upbringing in a small town-rural environment, my education, my life experiences, my "leisure" reading, my conversations with others, etc.). Thus, although the new religion introduced in this eBook was

² My dad—a carpenter by trade—had a well-worn [Thompson Chain-Reference Bible](#).

³ [Good News Bible: The Bible in Today's English Version](#). New York: American Bible Society, 1976.

⁴ Given this approach to the New Testament, questions regarding who wrote what books when do not arise, nor do questions regarding who selected what books were available for inclusion in the New Testament, in what order they should appear, why these various choices were made, etc.

⁵ To use a term associated with theologian [Delwin Brown](#), late dean of the [Pacific School of Religion](#)—a term which, to me, means "influenced."

inspired by the New Testament, of necessity does it reflect *all* of the factors that have shaped my life to this point in time.

Felicitas D. Goodman has asserted: “All societies have a word for religion. It is a named category. Unfortunately, this term is often mistranslated or misinterpreted, and may even go unreported. Linguistic fieldwork indicates that it is a composite category, consisting of three distinct parts: two refer immutably to the religious trance and the attendant ecstatic experience, on the one hand, and to the alternate reality, on the other, while the third one varies with the respective culture.”⁶

I quote this passage because the concept of religion that I have derived from the New Testament reflects the broad concept of religion to which Goodman was referring. Most of us who have been raised in Christianity in the United States have been taught that what “being religious” involves is (a) believing certain “facts,” (b) engaging in certain rituals, and (c) behaving in certain ways toward others—the latter being third on the list because of being third in importance! The religion that I introduce herein, however, eschews a set of “correct beliefs” as one of its components; and although it involves a simple ritual and values “goodness,” it involves other elements as well—as detailed below.

⁶ [*Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*](#). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 7.

Part I. Introduction

Section 1. Rationale

A proposal to create a new religion—a New Testament-*inspired* one at that—is likely to be met with at least four objections:

- Any such proposal is *suspect*, given that this is a nation of “hustlers.”
- Given that our society is at the point of near collapse, it is *pointless* to propose a new religion at this late stage in our history.
- A new religion with a New Testament basis is not *needed*, for we already have Christianity—a religion available in enough “flavors” to satisfy every possible taste.
- If our society needs anything, it is *less* religion, not *more*.

Let me, then, respond briefly to each of these possible objections:

The Proposal is Suspect (and, Besides, Our Society Will Soon Collapse)

Morris Berman uses the following quotation by [Alexis de Tocqueville](#) [1805 – 1859] as the epigraph for Chapter 1 of his [Why America Failed: The Roots of Imperial Decline](#):⁷

As one digs deeper into the national character of the Americans, one sees that they have sought the value of everything in this world only in the answer to this single question: how much money will it bring in?

The quotation is from a letter that de Tocqueville—from an aristocratic [Norman](#) family—had written to an Ernest de Chabrol in 1831. It will be recalled that de Tocqueville commenced a [visit to the United States](#) in 1831 with his friend [Gustave de Beaumont](#), and upon his return to France wrote the famous [Democracy in America](#), published in two volumes (1835 and 1840, respectively).

Berman then notes that historian [Walter A. McDougall](#) (in his [Freedom Just Around the Corner: A New American History: 1585 – 1828](#), 2004) had asserted that “at the center of the American

⁷ New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2011.

character lies a ‘penchant for hustling,’” which Berman then uses as the dominant theme for his book. In the book, he makes statements such as the following:

Oprah Winfrey’s “huge public acclaim reflects the fact that by and large, Americans regard capital accumulation as the purpose of life, and an abundance of consumer possessions as evidence of correct spiritual orientation (or even divine validation). Social context, let alone grassroots political organizing, doesn’t figure very large in this vision, which is, like [Reaganism](#), a species of fantasy.” (p. 47)⁸

The “[geographical frontier](#)” was declared officially closed in 1890, leaving a psychological vacuum that got quickly filled by the technological frontier.” (p. 74)

“Technical novelty is integral to the hustling life because it ensures that there is a ‘ladder’ to climb without end.” (p. 74)

Given “the historical record, the American exit will not be a graceful one; it’s not in our DNA. But even beyond that, the collapse could conceivably open the door to the alternative tradition discussed in this book, the world of [\[Ralph Waldo\] Emerson](#) and [\[Henry David\] Thoreau](#) and [\[Lewis\] Mumford](#) and [Vance Packard](#) and the South (without slavery). It’s a long shot, to be sure, but let’s consider it for a moment.” (p. 184)

In fact, 1965 -80 was a period “when the alternative tradition did enlist relatively large numbers of people in its cause.” (p. 30)

However, the fact of the matter is that “We’ll carry on hustling until we literally collapse from it (2008 being only a mild preview); this much is clear.” (p. 57)

Referring to [Herman Melville’s *Moby Dick*](#), and Captain Ahab of the [Pequod](#): “The fanatical pursuit of goods, money, power, technology, and ‘progress’ in effect created the whale that is currently ramming the ship to pieces; and if the suction of the vortex is slower in real life than in Melville’s novel, it is nevertheless steady and unrelenting.” (p. 164)

Now, if the “internal dynamics” of our society—rooted in our (ostensible) “penchant for hustling”—are such that our society is on the verge of collapse, it would seem pointless to introduce a new religion. However, although I believe, with Berman, that our society *will* collapse within a few decades—and would add **that this collapse will be accompanied by an extremely significant culling of our population (the world’s population, in fact)**, my perspective differs from that of Berman in two respects, in that I believe that:

⁸ I should note here that my own life experiences—as one who grew up in rural/small-town Wisconsin—are rather contrary to this assessment. My parents were [working class](#), and my impression is that many working class people who live in such an environment are relatively free of “possession” by America’s “holy trinity” of values—greed, materialism, and selfishness—and that that “lack” helps explain why they are near the bottom of the society’s “social ladder”!

- *Global warming* will be the cause of the collapse (with global warming culling most of the world's population within the next 50 years), rather than (as Berman seemingly argues) the “internal dynamics” currently operating in our society.
- Although it will *not be possible* to save many people from the devastation that global warming will be unleashing within a matter of decades (it's too late for that!), it *may* be possible to save a few—with the new religion proposed below (Sections 6 and 7) being *a* vehicle for their “salvation.”

Note here that my reference is to the salvation of *lives* rather than “*souls*”—and that I have been addressing the *second* possible objection listed above (that of a lack of a *meaningful future*), rather than the *first*—that of the proposal being *suspect*, given that this is a “nation of hustlers.” In my defense here, however, I would say that:

- I am “constitutionally” *incapable* of being a “hustler” (to address the first point made above)—and the above discussion should demonstrate that fact about me; in addition, I despise the [Elmer Gantry](#)s of our society as much as anyone (although I know that I shouldn't despise *anyone*!).
- Although I am thoroughly convinced that the future looks dark (to allude to another of [Berman's books](#)), I believe it essential that we at least *try* to save our species from possible extinction—and feel no need to offer a *rationale* for *that* conviction.

But We *Already Have* Christianity as a New Testament Religion

This is a claim that warrants a lengthy discussion—but I have chosen not to provide one here. Suffice it to say here that one would not be able to write a book with the ironic title [How Jesus Became Christian](#)⁹ if Christianity actually *were* a New Testament religion!). I would add that Christianity, in its current “condition,” is simply *irrelevant* for the problem of global warming—and in that respect very much “out of tune” with the [Hebrew prophets](#) (who were very much “in tune” with the contemporary societal situation, and where it was heading).

We Need *Less* Religion, Not *More*

[Anthony C. Grayling](#), in a recent book,¹⁰ states (pp. 2 - 3):

⁹ By Barrie Wilson. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2008.

¹⁰ [The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism](#). New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2013.

Religion's claims and beliefs do not stand up to examination. Briefly put, critical examination of religion's claims places it in the same class as astrology and magic. Like these systems of thought, religion dates from mankind's less educated and knowledgeable early history, and like them it has been superseded by advances in our understanding of the world and ourselves. Or should have been superseded: its survival, as with the survival of astrology and other outlooks from the past, is the prompt for critical discussion of its claims and outlook.

I have no serious problems with this statement by Grayling—insofar as it refers to most of the religions that have come into existence to date. However, I believe it wise, first, to heed Jared Diamond's assertion¹¹ that "Religion's near ubiquity among human societies suggests that it fulfills important functions, regardless of whether its claims are true."¹² In fact, in his Chapter 9 ("What Electric Eels Tell Us About the Evolution of Religion," pp. 323 – 368), his Figure 9.1 (p. 367) provides a summary of the seven functions that he attributes to religion (which he struggles to define at the beginning of the chapter). What makes Diamond's discussion of interest is that he uses a *developmental* perspective—meaning that (a) the initial functions of religion were very limited, but that over time (b) new functions were added to the mix, and (c) although the earliest functions have tended to decline in importance over time, they have tended not to disappear completely.

The functions of religion, as identified by Diamond (in the chronological order of appearance identified by Diamond):

- That of *explanation*—attributing the existence and of things to supernatural entities.
- "Defusing"—i.e., reducing—feelings of anxiety through participation in rituals.
- Providing feelings of *comfort*, by providing explanations for pain and one's eventual death.
- Providing a *standardized organization*—with buildings for "worship" activities, full-time priests, sacred books, etc.
- Helping achieve *political obedience* by the populace.

¹¹ [*The World Until Yesterday: What Can We Learn From Traditional Societies?*](#) New York: Viking, 2013, p. 31.

¹² Nicholas Wade (*op. cit.*, p. 278) is in agreement with this position: "It seems unlikely that suddenly it [i.e., religion] no longer has a useful role to play."

- Developing *moral codes* that specify how one should relate toward strangers.¹³
- Provide *intellectual justification* for wars. (A rather damning comment!)

Thinking particularly of current United States society, and of *church-going* rather than religion *per se*, I would add six additional functions:

- Enabling those who feel lonely and isolated to meet with others, and get involved in some of a church's activities—e.g., working in its “food pantry.” This feature of religions today might especially be attractive to widows and widowers, and housewives.
- If one is employed, one's job likely calls on just a limited range of one's abilities, and membership in a church can furnish one with opportunities to use other talents—such as singing (in the church's choir), playing a musical instrument (in the church's orchestra), or exercising one's leadership abilities (by volunteering for membership on boards and committees).
- If one is a politician (e.g., a local alderman) or the owner of a small business, being involved with a church provides one with a subtle opportunity to “advertise” oneself—thereby convincing people to vote for one, or to patronize one's business.
- In that churches provide one with an opportunity to meet with like-minded others, they have potential for enabling one to find a husband or wife, and/or to develop close friendships with a few others.
- Religions are important *employers*—of clergy, administrators and bureaucrats in religious organizations, manufacturers and distributors of religious goods, etc. As Elaine Pagels notes (p. 35) in Chapter II (“‘One God, One Bishop’: The Politics of Monotheism”) of her [*The Gnostic Gospels*](#),¹⁴ [Ignatius of Antioch](#), a bishop in Syria, “defended the three ranks [that had developed in what Bart D. Ehrman would term the “proto-orthodox”¹⁵ version of Christianity]—bishop, priests, and deacons—as a hierarchical order that mirrors the divine hierarchy in heaven. As there is only one God in heaven, Ignatius declares, so there can be only one bishop in the church.” It should be noted, however,

¹³ It's not clear why Diamond refers to moral codes only with reference to one's interactions with strangers.

¹⁴ New York: Random House, 1979.

¹⁵ See, e.g., his [Lost Christianities: The Battles for Scripture and the Faiths We Never Knew](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.

that (p. 43) the bishop in the emerging proto-orthodox version of Christianity “defined his role in traditional Romans terms, as ruler, teacher, and judge of the church,”¹⁶ and this fact suggests that the leaders of the proto-orthodox party were influenced in their thinking more by existing *secular* values than by *theological* ideas; also, the fact that the version of Gnosticism promoted by Marcus (a disciple of [Valentinus](#)) involved *no* professional clergy (!), suggests that the objections that the proto-orthodox leadership had with Gnosticism had more to do with the fact that Gnosticism posed a threat to their continued *employment* than with theological matters!

- Referring especially to what Diamond refers to as “state” societies, the various sectors comprising a societal system—political, economic, educational, religious, cultural, etc.—tend to “work” in relative harmony in support of that sector that happens to be dominant at the time and, more generally, to support the Existing Order. *Religion* has, at times, been the dominant sector in Western history (e.g., during the “Middle Ages”), but before that time was subservient to the *state*—and the characteristics that Christianity acquired during that early period continued into the “Middle Ages.”

With the growing importance of commerce (as a result of explorations, “advances” in technology, etc.), however, the leaders of Roman Catholicism began to lose their position of dominance—a change that was “aided and abetted” by the rise of Protestantism. How? What the changing economy in Europe needed was an intellectual “boost”—e.g., “a theology in which man’s worldly ambitions were not just tolerated but encouraged.”¹⁷ Such a theology was developed by [Martin Luther](#) (the notion of a “[calling](#)”) and [John Calvin](#). The *intentions* of Luther and Calvin were not, it would seem, to encourage “worldly ambitions,”¹⁸ but the *effects* of their theologies were to so do. As Linden notes (*op. cit.*, p. 103), with the rise of Protestantism (the “spirit” of which grew to “infect” Catholicism as well!), the “entrepreneurial spirit” was freed “by creating a psychic window between act and responsibility.”

One could very well argue, in fact, that religion’s primary function today (in the United States in particular) is to serve the interests of the Economy, the elite members of it in particular.

¹⁶ That is, they had a *control* mentality that was “worldly,” rather than a mentality shaped by the teachings of Jesus, as recorded in the [\(canonical\) gospels](#).

¹⁷ Eugene Linden, [Affluence and Discontent: The Anatomy of Consumer Societies](#). New York: The Viking Press, 1979, p. 102.

¹⁸ In fact, Linden (*op. cit.*, p. 102) added that “Luther would have been appalled at the worldly way in which his message took shape.”

Nicholas Wade claims (*op. cit.*, p. 277) that the fact of religion’s “near ubiquity” proves that there is an “inherited propensity for ritual and belief . . . [that is] wired into the human mind” I disagree with this claim, however, believing, rather, that religion’s near universality is explained by humans having evolved to a point where they had *consciousness*, with religion’s development emerging from a complex interaction between (a) consciousness, (b) perceptions, (c) language development, and (d) the thought processes enabled by (a), (b) and (c). I find it likely that certain inherited traits *do* play a role in religion’s development, but would contend that that influence tends to be *indirect*. I would add that although [church attendance figures](#) today (in Europe especially) are consistent with Diamond’s functional interpretation of religion, they are not at all consistent with Wade’s thesis that religion has a genetic basis.

Wade asks (pp. 279 - 280): “But could it [i.e., religion] perhaps be changed, reshaped in a manner that enhanced its cohesive properties and diminishes it clashes with modernity and rationality?—and I answer: “Yes, I believe that it *can* be so changed, and herein offer such a religion!”

Wade opines that what would be needed by an adequate new religion is that it:

would retain all its old powers of binding people together for a common purpose, whether for morality or defense. It would touch all the senses and lift the mind. It would transcend self. And it would find a way to be equally true to emotion and to reason, to our need to belong to one another and to what has been learned of the human condition through rational inquiry.

I believe that the religion that I propose in the following pages *would* meet all of those needs,¹⁹ although Wade’s reference to “defense” has its basis in questionable assumptions²⁰ regarding violence among our early ancestors (assumptions that he shares with Diamond²¹). And as I expect that that new religion would be dynamic, rather than static, I am confident that over time it *increasingly* meet the needs identified by Wade.

Part II next identifies and discusses the principles upon which the new religion is based, these all having their basis in the New Testament—(a) virtues, (b) an alternate state of consciousness, (c) participatory meetings, and (d) an orientation to the future.

¹⁹ But will let the reader decide for himself or herself.

²⁰ See, e.g., Robert W. Sussman and C. Robert Cloninger, eds., [Origins of Altruism and Cooperation](#). New York: Springer, 2011; and Douglas P. Fry, ed., [War, Peace, and Human Nature: The Convergence of Evolutionary and Cultural Views](#). New York: Oxford University Press, 2013.

²¹ Diamond has received criticism on this score; for example, see [this](#).

The (subsequent) organization of this eBook is as follows:

Part II: The Principles Underlying the New Religion

Section 2. Virtues

Section 3. An Alternate State of Consciousness

Section 4. Participatory Meetings

Section 5. Future Orientation

Part III: The New Religion

Section 6. Introductory Comments

Section 7. The Religion: Nature and Expected Outcomes

Part IV. Conclusions

Section 8. Conclusions: “Always Reforming”

Part II: The Principles Underlying the New Religion

Section 2. Virtues

Despite the fact that the virtues “held up” by the new religion have their basis in the New Testament, I believe it useful—for purposes of contrast—to begin the discussion with a consideration of *American* virtues. And who better than [Benjamin Franklin](#) to act as a spokesman (an *early* one, at any rate) for those virtues?

For Franklin the virtuous life consisted of:

- [Temperance](#)
- [Silence](#)
- [Order](#)
- [Resolution](#)
- [Frugality](#)
- [Industry](#)
- [Sincerity](#)
- [Justice](#)
- [Moderation](#)
- [Cleanliness](#)
- [Tranquility](#)
- [Chastity](#)
- [Humility](#)

What’s notable about this list of 13 “virtues” is its *individualistic* nature—the fact that that it does not focus on how one should relate to *others* (except for doing so justly, and with sincerity). As Eugene Linden notes (*op. cit.*, p. 103): “Instead of direct attention to the sufferings of one’s fellowman and the needs of the community, the Puritan best served his fellows [he came to

believe—sincerely one would like to assume] by his absolute devotion to his worldly calling. This, in effect, permitted the devout to cheat their brethren and still feel pious about their ultimate vindication by a higher calling.”

Although [Adam Smith](#) later (in his 1759 [Theory of Moral Sentiments](#)) had [argued that](#) “people are naturally empathetic to those suffering in their midst,” *that* idea came to be overshadowed by his “[invisible hand](#)” concept—with its insistence that “individuals’ efforts to maximize their own gains in a free market benefits society, even if the ambitious have no benevolent intentions.” The beneficial effects attributed to the hidden hand’s operation by Smith *may*, true, occur in a small-scale society within which social class differentiation is not notable, but the invisible hand’s benefits *cannot be generalized* beyond such a society—as we have been [finding out](#)!

I should perhaps also mention—regarding statements of virtues by Americans—that “Christian values” were featured in the famous “McGuffey Readers” (authored by [William Holmes McGuffey](#)), of which it [has been said](#):

While McGuffey was teaching at Miami [University, located just north of Cincinnati in Ohio], he established a reputation as a lecturer on moral and biblical subjects. In 1835, the small [Cincinnati](#) publishing firm of [Truman and Smith](#) asked McGuffey to create a series of four graded readers for primary-level students. McGuffey was recommended for the job by [Harriet Beecher Stowe](#) [author of the famous [Uncle Tom’s Cabin](#)], a longtime friend. He completed the first two readers within a year of signing his contract, receiving a fee of \$1,000 (\$20,000 in 2012 dollars). While McGuffey compiled the first four readers (1836-1837 edition), the fifth and sixth were created by his brother Alexander during the 1840s. The series consisted of stories, poems, essays and speeches. The advanced Readers contained excerpts from the works of well-regarded English and American writers and politicians such as [John Milton](#), [Lord Byron](#) and [Daniel Webster](#).

It is estimated that at least 120 million copies of McGuffey’s Readers were sold between 1836 and 1960, placing its sales in a category with the [Bible](#) and [Webster’s Dictionary](#).

In a sense, then, the McGuffey Readers were Bible-like books—but, like Franklin’s “virtues,” had an individualistic orientation.²²

My concern in this section, however, is solely with virtues as expressed in the *New Testament*, and let me begin with [this commentary](#) on “virtues”:

Today “virtue” has taken on soft and effeminate connotations. But originally, the word “virtue” was inextricably connected to what it meant to be a true man. The word comes from the Latin

²² It has been [noted](#), however, that: “A major revision in 1879 altered the slant of the readers away from the stark Calvinism which had characterized the earlier versions, but did so without sacrificing the basic religious and moral objectives.”

virtus, which in turn is derived from *vir*, Latin for “manliness.” These days guys excuse their lack of virtue by hiding behind the excuse of being “just a guy.” Men need to do better and strive to improve themselves each day. It’s time to restore the tie between manliness and virtue.

I think of “virtues” as encompassing both *values* and *behaviors* stemming from values, and for that reason I find it useful to identify virtues on the basis of how one should, and should not, *be*, and what one should, and should not, *do*. Before engaging in such identification, however, let me first make some general comments.

Despite calls—e.g., by [Anthony C. Grayling](#)²³—to abandon religion in favor of humanism, I agree with Jared Diamond’s statement (see Section 1) that: “Religion’s near ubiquity among human societies suggests that it fulfills important functions, regardless of whether its claims are true.” I am also impressed by the fact that some of the greatest intellectuals of the past few centuries have maintained an interest in religion. For example, although only one of Thorstein Veblen’s many works dealt with Christianity,²⁴ his biographer has stated that

he was deeply moved when his favourite brother, Thomas, at the point of death, uttered the words: “I am happy with the Host.” The problem of religion was always with him and, according to a sister, formed the central topic of discussion with his father. Even though Veblen thought he had found out “why we need not believe in God,” this favourite child of an “electrically religious” mother seems never to have been completely satisfied with his solution.²⁵

Thomas Jefferson also, decades before Veblen, had an abiding interest in religion; for example, it [has been said](#) of him: “Throughout his life Jefferson was intensely interested in [theology](#), [religious studies](#), and [morality](#).”^[1] For Jefferson, however, it has been [said](#) that for him

deep devotion to Jesus' moral teachings constituted the essence of true religion. Jefferson wrote a friend: "I am a Christian, in the only sense he [Jesus] wished one to be; sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others; ascribing to himself every human excellence; and believing he never claimed any other." According to his biographer, Fawn M. Brodie, he "despised clergyman all his adult life" and evinced a "hatred of the established faith" that was well-nigh unparalleled in his time, and made it one of his chief aims during the Revolution to quell the power of the Anglican Church. A year before his death, he described

²³ See his [The God Argument: The Case Against Religion and for Humanism](#). New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2013.

²⁴ “Christian Morals and the Competitive System,” published (1910) in *The International Journal of Ethics*, and reprinted in (pp. 200 - 218) [Essays in Our Changing Order](#), edited by Leon Ardzrooni (1934). This article inspired Charles M. A. Clark to [revisit](#) it in 2006. I should perhaps note that Veblen concluded this article by asserting that “the ancient racial bias embodied in the Christian principle of brotherhood should logically continue to gain ground at the expense of the pecuniary morals of competitive business.” *Logically*, perhaps, but by no means *actually*!

²⁵ Joseph Dorfman, [Thorstein Veblen and His America](#). New York: The Viking Press, 1934, p. 58.

himself as a Unitarian; several years earlier, he declined to serve as a baptismal sponsor because he did not accept the Trinity.

Jefferson can, of course, be criticized for *not living well enough* by those principles (e.g., he owned slaves—not unusual for his time), but as Jesus reputedly said ([John 8:7](#)), “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her” (i.e., the woman caught in adultery). But, from my perspective, his *heart* was in the right place.

It has also [been said](#) of Jefferson:

Jefferson believed the New Testament was corrupt. As a result it contained "the monstrosities of dogma, superstition, and priestcraft, which were the very essence of Christian orthodoxy." So he took a scissors to the New Testament and snipped out all the supernatural elements, leaving only Jesus' moral teaching of absolute love and service intact. He began to cut out the authentic passages of his two King James Bibles. The project took only two or three evenings. He found the "task obvious and easy." A nearly identical effort by the Jesus Seminar some two centuries later would take many researchers nearly a decade.

Jefferson called his micro-Testament *The Philosophy of Jesus of Nazareth*. He characterized it as "a precious morsel of ethics" and it was a thin book. He claimed that his Bible version demonstrated that he was a "real Christian." "It is a document in proof that I am a real Christian, that is to say, a disciple of the doctrines of Jesus." In 1819 or 1820, Jefferson compiled a second scripture by subtraction, calling it *The Life and Morals of Jesus of Nazareth*, popularly known as the Jefferson Bible. It consists of a single account of Jesus' ministry made up of passages from all four Gospels; it omits the entire Old Testament, the Act of the Apostles, the Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. It omits gospel passages that seemed to Jefferson to be at odds with the spirit of Jesus. It also omits the resurrection, and ends with Jesus being laid in his tomb. Jefferson's aim was to remove from the gospel all things that, in his view, had obviously been added on by the gospel writers themselves. Jefferson had no use for the apostle Paul. "Like other Enlightenment rationalists," writes historian Jaroslav Pelikan, "Jefferson was convinced that the real villain in the Christian story was the apostle Paul, who had corrupted the religion of Jesus into a religion *about* Jesus." He dismissed his detractors as imposters peddling a counterfeit faith. He argued that religion is necessary for the well-being of the nation. He said that his version of "purified Christianity could promote moral health in the actual setting of eighteenth-century America." He was optimistic about the future of his faith. He wrote in 1822, "I confidently expect that the present generation will see Unitarianism become the general religion of the United States." [A confidence that was not justified, of course!]

The value that Jefferson perceived in the New Testament (the four gospels, in particular), then, was in the *values* promulgated—directly and indirectly—therein, a judgment with which I agree (although I also—as I indicated earlier—derive three other principles from the New Testament, and will be using the term “virtues” rather than “values” in this eBook). This, then, suggests the question: What specific virtues *are*, then, promulgated in the New Testament (as a whole—not just the gospels)? Emulating Jefferson, what I have therefore done is spend a few hours perusing my copy of the New Testament to identify what seem to me to be the basic virtues stated in that

collection of books. I present my list in the following table, using four categories: How one (a) should be and (b) *not* be; and what one (c) should do and (d) *not* do.

One can perhaps think of the “be’s” and “not be’s” here as primarily informing one how one should *conduct* oneself in relating to others, with the “do’s” and “don’t do’s” indicating—at varying degrees of abstraction—*what* one should do for others, i.e., the *behaviors* that one should engage in relative to others. In all cases, however, what makes these entries “virtues” is that all refer in some manner to one’s interactions with others—a concept of “virtues” that differs from that held by Benjamin Franklin, as I noted earlier.²⁶

In most cases it is rather clear *how* one should be and *what* one should do, but after presenting the table I identify cases where this is less clear, and indicate *how* the given point *might* be interpreted to make its bearing on behavior relative to others more obvious.

Be:

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| A peace maker | Matthew 5:9 |
| Cautious | Matthew 10:16 |
| Compassionate | Philippians 2:1; Colossians 3:12 |
| Faithful | Galatians 5:22 |
| Forgiving | Colossians 3:12 |
| Gentle | Matthew 10:16 |
| Humble | Matthew 5:5; 18:4; Galatians 5:23; Philippians 2:3; Colossians 3:12 |
| Kind | Matthew 12:7; Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:12 |
| Merciful | Matthew 5:7 |
| Patient | Galatians 5:22; Colossians 3:12 |
| Quietly charitable | Matthew 6:2 |

²⁶ It goes without saying (does it not?!) that the *virtues* stated in the New Testament have little or no bearing on the *behavior* of “Christians”—evidence that Christianity is somewhat of a “sham”. For example, Juan Cole has [pointed out](#) that of the 102 million “Twentieth Century Deaths in War and Political Violence by Religious Groups” virtually all of the killings were done by Christians of European heritage (relative to Muslims)

| | |
|------------|-----------------|
| Respectful | I Peter 2:17 |
| Tolerant | Colossians 3:12 |

Don't be:

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| Angry | Matthew 5:22 |
| Deceitful | Mark 7:22 |
| Greedy | Mark 7:22 |
| Jealous | Mark 7:22 |
| Judgmental of others | Matthew 7:1 |
| Prideful | Mark 7:22 |
| Revengeful | Matthew 5:39 |

Do:

| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| Befriend the stranger | Matthew 25:35, 38, 43, 44 |
| Care for orphans | James 1:27 |
| Care for the sick | Matthew 25:36, 39, 43, 44 |
| Care for widows | James 1:27 |
| Clothe the naked | Matthew 25:36, 38, 43, 44 |
| Do for others (what you want them to do for you) | Matthew 7:12 |
| Exercise self-control | Galatians 5:22 |
| Feed the hungry | Matthew 25:35, 37, 42, 44 |
| Give drink to the thirsty | Matthew 25:35, 37, 42, 44 |
| Lend without expecting anything in return | Luke 6:35 |

| | |
|---|--------------------------------------|
| Live in peace with others (so far as is possible) | Mark 9:50 |
| Love your enemies | Matthew 5:44 |
| Love your neighbor as you love yourself | Matthew 22:39 |
| Put others' interests ahead of your own | I Corinthians 10:24; Philippians 2:4 |
| Share with others | Luke 3:11; Acts 4:32 |
| Show your love by actions | I John 3:18 |
| Treat everyone the same | Romans 12:16 |
| Visit those in prison | Matthew 25:36, 39, 43, 44 |
| Work hard | Romans 12:11 |

Don't:

| | |
|-----------------------------|--------------|
| Accumulate | Matthew 6:19 |
| Commit adultery | Mark 7:22 |
| Do foolish things | Mark 7:22 |
| Engage in indecent behavior | Mark 7:22 |
| Kill others | Mark 7:21 |
| Rob others | Mark 7:21 |
| Slander others | Mark 7:22 |
| Worry | Matthew 6:25 |

As promised, following are some comments to indicate—for some of the entries—how a given entry can be interpreted to show its bearing on behavior.

- Be cautious in *how* you relate to others, so that you don't offend them, thereby reducing their respect for you, and making them reluctant to receive help from you.
- Be faithful in meeting your commitments to others, so that they don't lose their respect for you, and become unwilling to receive help from you.

- Be humble—so that others will respect, even like, you, and thereby more willing to accept help from you.
- Be patient in relating to others, so that you do not offend others, thereby reducing the likelihood that they will want to receive any help from you.
- Don't be greedy; let others have their share.
- Don't be jealous, thereby not able to relate well to those of whom you are jealous—and even others, for that matter.
- Don't be judgmental of others, so that you will be unwilling to render assistance to them.
- Don't be prideful, thereby offending others, and thus reducing their willingness to accept help from you. Besides, if you are prideful, you are unlikely even to have an *interest* in helping others!
- Exercise self-control in relating to others, so that you do not offend them, thereby reducing the probability that they will accept help from you.
- Treat everyone the same, so that they will respect, even perhaps like, you, thereby, and therefore feel comfortable receiving your assistance.
- Visit those in prison. In the United States a punitive attitude prevails, which is a part of the reason why our prison population is so high. In [Norway](#), in contrast, the emphasis is on rehabilitation rather than punishment, the intent being to prepare prisoners for re-entry into the society. Given the lack of such an orientation in the United States, it would be a good idea for more to attempt to visit people in prison, to let them know that others care for them.
- Don't accumulate, thereby diverting your attention away from what you *should* be doing—attending to the needs of others.
- Don't do foolish things, thereby causing others to lose their respect for you, so that they won't accept help offered to them by you.
- Don't engage in indecent behaviors,²⁷ for the same reason.

²⁷ Granted that “indecent” has no objective meaning but, rather, has a *societally-constructed* meaning.

- Don't slander others; if you have harsh feelings about others, keep those feelings to yourself. In fact, try to expunge them from your mind—for such thoughts will interfere with your motivation to help others.
- Don't worry or otherwise be self-absorbed, for that will prevent you from having empathy for others, thereby inhibiting the performance of any helpful activities that you might be able to engage in relative to others.

Note that what the table consists of is *direct* “commands,” but that at times commands are stated *indirectly*—such as in [Matthew 25:31 – 45](#), a portion of which is:

³⁴ “Then the King will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, ³⁶ I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me.’”

What's of particular interest regarding *this* passage is that the six “commands” in it are repeated *four times!*—for emphasis, one would assume.

A command—to help those in need—is also stated *indirectly* in the famous Good Samaritan parable ([Luke 10:29 – 37](#)):

²⁹ But he [“an expert in the law”] wanted to justify himself, so he asked Jesus, “And who is my neighbor?”

³⁰ In reply Jesus said: “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, when he was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothes, beat him and went away, leaving him half dead. ³¹ A priest happened to be going down the same road, and when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² So too, a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan, as he traveled, came where the man was; and when he saw him, he took pity on him. ³⁴ He went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey, brought him to an inn and took care of him. ³⁵ The next day he took out two denarii^[a] and gave them to the innkeeper. ‘Look after him,’ he said, ‘and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.’

³⁶ “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?”

³⁷ The expert in the law replied, “The one who had mercy on him.”

Jesus told him, “Go and do likewise.”

Finally, moral behavior (forgiveness, specifically) is “modeled” in, e.g., the famous story of the woman caught in adultery ([John 7:53 – 8:11](#)):

⁵³ Then they all went home, ¹ but Jesus went to the Mount of Olives.

² At dawn he appeared again in the temple courts, where all the people gathered around him, and he sat down to teach them. ³ The teachers of the law and the Pharisees brought in a woman caught in adultery. They made her stand before the group ⁴ and said to Jesus, “Teacher, this woman was caught in the act of adultery. ⁵ In the Law Moses commanded us to stone such women. Now what do you say?” ⁶ They were using this question as a trap, in order to have a basis for accusing him.

But Jesus bent down and started to [ostensibly] write on the ground with his finger. ⁷ When they kept on questioning him, he straightened up and said to them, “Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” ⁸ Again he stooped down and [ostensibly] wrote on the ground.

⁹ At this, those who heard began to go away one at a time, the older ones first, until only Jesus was left, with the woman still standing there. ¹⁰ Jesus straightened up and asked her, “Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?”

¹¹ “No one, sir,” she said.

“Then neither do I condemn you,” Jesus declared. “Go now and leave your life of sin.”

The moral principles stated in the New Testament are ones that many of us can relate to—in part because they are familiar to us, but more importantly because they “speak” to our nature as humans—for we were—recent research has demonstrated—“[born to be good](#)” (the title of a recent book by [Dacher Keltner](#), of the [Greater Good Science Center](#)).

But if we are “born to be good,” as Keltner claims, why, then, is “goodness” relatively rare in our society?—being *most* absent, apparently, in those of middle or higher class. Two answers can be offered to this question:

- To quote [Robert Adamson](#) [1852 – 1902]²⁸:

the remarkable discrepancy between the Christian code of morals and the actual practice of Christian communities. The discrepancy can hardly be denied, but it may be explained by insisting that the Christian teaching relates primarily to the formation of character; that it inculcates dispositions from which, if due opportunity be furnished, the duly conforming type of

²⁸ “Moral Theory and Moral Practice” (1900, pp. 229 - 230). This appears in (pp. 212 – 242) [Ethical Democracy: Essays in Social Dynamics](#), edited by Stanton Coit. London: Grant Richards, 1900.

action would follow. It need hardly be pointed out how wide a field this explanation, if accepted, would yield for that most common weakness of human nature, self-deception. **To suppose it possible that a human character can be moulded into the Christian dispositions and excellences of character, while it develops in and among institutions of life admittedly not framed upon the Christian model or adjusted to it, is to put at defiance all that we know of the interdependence of character and circumstance.** Dispositions, and the objective counterparts of them, acknowledged modes of life, must always go together, and neither can be understood in separation from the other.

(The **bolding** in the above paragraph has been added by me.)

That is, if one lives in a society wherein the institutions are such that they do not *conduce* moral behavior, (a) one will not *learn* moral behavior—*really* learn it (i.e., *internalize* it so that it guides one’s behavior), not just *memorize* some moral principles—in the process of growing up, and (b) even if one *does* so learn moral behavior, one will find that the society’s institutions make *engaging* in moral behavior regularly rather difficult, if not virtually impossible.

I would add that one might argue that writers in the “utopian” tradition over the years have at least *sensed* this fact, and have proposed alternate societal arrangements as the “cure” for this problem.²⁹ This is a point that I will touch on further later.

- The *nature of the society* within which one lives may make moral behavior difficult, but especially if one has been *socialized to live in that society* (to repeat, in different words, the point that I made under the first point)—as *most* of a society’s “inmates” are.

Now if the main *reasons* for a lack of moral behavior in a society are (a) the society’s institutions and (b) being socialized to live compatibly with them, it would seem that there are, therefore, two answers to the problem:

- Change the society’s institutions.
- Make an effort to *not* socialize some of the society’s members to the existing institutions (a solution that, e.g., the [Amish](#) have used).

However,

²⁹ The literature in this area is extensive, one excellent example being [Utopias and Utopian Thought](#), edited by Frank E. Manuel (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979); and (in the case of “realized utopias”) [America’s Communal Utopias](#), edited by Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

- Changing the society's institutions would not be accomplished easily.
- If a society's members are somehow trained to *not* fit well the society's institutions, not only will the society's *members* live in constant misery,³⁰ but the *society itself* will not function well. (Of course, the likelihood of this “strategy” being implemented is 0.00!)

There *is*, however, another possible answer to the problem of not enough moral behavior, and that answer is discussed in the next section.

³⁰ Unless, that is, they create communities for “their kind” to live in apart from the Larger Society—as have the [Amish](#), [Hutterites](#), etc.

Section 3: Alternate State of Consciousness

It will be useful to begin here with a figure that allows us to make several distinctions relative to altered states of consciousness:³¹

| | A | B |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | | |
| 2 | | |

A - State sought
B - State "just happens"
1 - Explanation offered
2 - No explanation offered

This figure gives us four possibilities:

- A1 An altered state of consciousness is actively sought, and an explanation is offered for the state, once achieved.
- B1 An altered state of consciousness “just happens” to someone, with an explanation for that state being offered.
- A2 An altered state of consciousness is actively sought, but no explanation is offered for the state, once achieved.
- B2 An altered state of consciousness “just happens” to someone, but no explanation is offered for the altered state.

³¹ I feel an obligation to “confess” at this point that this section has roots in my early childhood. My parents had both been raised in the same Norwegian Lutheran church (which my ancestors had helped establish), but shortly after their marriage—and for reasons that are not clear to me—decided that Lutheranism was too “dead” for them. What may have precipitated this decision was an evangelist who had come to town and held meetings in the vacant portion of a building, some of which meetings my parents attended. This experience caused them to get together with a few other couples who had attended those meetings, to form the Assemblies of God church in Wautoma, Wisconsin (where I was born; the Thompson Hall in the new church now in Wautoma was named after my dad). Thus, I was raised in this church, and attended summer “camp” meetings with my parents at a location not far from Wautoma. While in church—and especially while at this camp—I witnessed cases of “speaking in tongues” (i.e., [glossolalia](#)), which was interpreted as evidence of “Spirit-filling.” I, personally, have never been able to perceive any value in glossolalia, but (a) it is a phenomenon referred to at various points in the New Testament—and elsewhere in the Bible (see [this](#))—and (b) the phenomenon that it refers to—an altered state of consciousness, with “Spirit-filling as the *explanation*—is the subject of this section.

The A1 category is probably the most common one that occurs (with various means used to achieve the state—so that the explanation is obvious); the A2 category would seem to be a logical impossibility, with the B1 and B2 categories not being common—but likely being memorable for those having the experience.

The initial question to ask here is: *What* is an altered state of consciousness?—and here is [one answer](#):

An **altered state of consciousness** (ASC),^[1] also called altered state of mind, is any condition which is significantly different from a normal waking [beta wave](#) state. The expression was used as early as 1966 by Arnold M. Ludwig^[2] and brought into common usage from 1969 by [Charles Tart](#).^{[3][4]} It describes induced changes in one's mental state, almost always temporary. A synonymous phrase is "altered state of awareness".

Altered states of consciousness can be associated with artistic [creativity](#)^[5] or different [focus levels](#). They also can be shared interpersonally and studied as a subject of sociological research.^[6]

The article goes on to note that :

An altered state of [consciousness](#) can come about accidentally [the B1 category] through, for example, [fever](#), infections such as [meningitis](#),^[7] [sleep deprivation](#), [fasting](#), [oxygen deprivation](#), [nitrogen narcosis](#) (deep diving), [psychosis](#),^[8] [temporal lobe epilepsy](#) or a [traumatic](#) accident. Altered states of consciousness also occur in healthy women experiencing childbirth,^[9] hence the introduction of the term *gender-specific states of consciousness*.^[10]

And that:

An ASC can sometimes be reached intentionally by the use of [sensory deprivation](#), an [isolation tank](#), [sleep deprivation](#), [lucid dreaming](#), [hypnosis](#), [meditation](#), [prayer](#), or disciplines (e.g. [Mantra Meditation](#), [Yoga](#), [Sufism](#), [dream yoga](#).) [all in the B1 category]

ASCs can also be attained through the ingestion of [psychoactive drugs](#) such as [alcohol](#) and [opiates](#), but more commonly with [traditional hallucinogens](#) of indigenous cultures, plants such as [cannabis](#), [psilocybin mushrooms](#), [Peyote](#), and [Ayahuasca](#). Other modern hallucinogens that some attempt to use for a similar purpose are [\(D\)-methorphan](#), [LSD-25](#), [substituted phenethylamines](#), [substituted tryptamines](#), and [substituted amphetamines](#) such as those listed in the books [PiHKAL](#) and [TiHKAL](#) by Dr. [Alexander Shulgin](#), a former [analytical organic chemist](#). These drugs are often noted as "[designer drugs](#)" by authorities and professionals or as "[research chemicals](#)" by the hallucinogen-use and distribution underground, as an attempt to avoid prosecution under the [Federal Analogue Act](#). [all in the A1 category]

Sufi Saint [Qutbuddin Bakhtiar Kaki](#), who participated in [Sama](#) and died because of a super state of ecstasy while listening to a mystical Islamic Sufi poet sung by Ahmad-i-Jam. Sufi continued listening and felt very enraptured also overcome by listening to the poet, and first fainted

because of ecstasy by the poet, then after several days, the saint died while still in the state of ecstasy.

The significance of the above discussion is that—as Felicitas D. Goodman has noted³²—“Since the onset of the Age of Enlightenment nearly three hundred years ago, and even earlier, there has been a trend away from religious experience in all Christian denominations and toward a thinking about religion instead.” By “experience,” Goodman is referring here to an *altered state of consciousness* (“[trance](#)” in particular), and relative to this matter³³ she states that (p. 34) “until quite recently, Western observers were unaware of even the availability and pervasive institutionalization of the trance in most rites, let alone able to identify its occurrence during an actual event. Neither did they realize that the strenuous initiation rituals that most non-Western societies subject their young people to, were designed to confer a lifelong control over the ability to enter a trance.”

When we modern Americans—suffering, as we do, from “trance depravation”—think of altered states of consciousness (ASCs), we are likely to think either of drug “highs” or states of alcoholic inebriation (the A1 box in the figure above). But as the quotations on the previous page illustrate, the ASC is a complex phenomenon—in its *causation*, its “*meaning*” to members of a given group, its *effects*, its very *nature*, in fact.

In the ancient world—and in much of the “third world” today—ASC not only is, but has been, common, but also has been thought of primarily in terms of the A1 box of the above figure—the primary difference, however, being that the *cause* of the ASC is an indwelling “*Spirit*” (induced, in some cases, by chemical means). That is, ASC is thought of in terms of Spirit *possession*.

What does that *involve*? Steven L. Davies (*op. cit.*)—who has asserted (p. 25) that “Possession is a powerful psychophysiological experience that is so widespread in human cultures that the potential for the possession experience is part of the genetic inheritance of all people”—has identified the following as some of its characteristics:

- Substitution “of an altered form of consciousness for an individual’s normal form of consciousness.” (p. 24)
- “Possession trance is an altered state of consciousness wherein an individual experiences a change in personal identity so that he or she feels himself or herself to be, and is socially defined to be, some other person altogether.” (p. 26)

³² [Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World](#). Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988, p. 35.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

- “In the experience of possession a mind generates alternatively (not simultaneously) more than one persona.”³⁴ (p. 26)
- “. . . religious possession is to be distinguished from ritual or dramatic enactments where, although the individual may be socially defined as another person, the sense of personal identity remains unaltered.” (p. 27)
- “. . . possession assumes a body-mind dichotomy; the body remains the same; the persona is considered to have changed.” (p. 27)
- “Possession occurs in two contrasting forms, and cultures may have either or both. One I shall call ‘demon’ possession: i.e., those instances of possession where an individual is believed to have had his or her persona occasionally replaced by a malevolent alternate ego causing him or her to act in socially unacceptable ways, sometimes with deleterious effects upon his or her own person. I shall call ‘spirit’ possession those instances of possession where an individual is believed to have had his or her persona replaced by a benevolent and/or useful alternate-ego causing him or her to act in ways beneficial to, or at least acceptable to, his or her immediate society.” (p. 31)
- “Whether or not the capacity to experience possession trance is actualized depends mainly on cultural expectations: where it is expected it occurs frequently; where it is not expected it occurs rarely. Possession trance is not a pathological condition.” (p.33)
- “At its conclusion, a possession experience usually leaves the individual in a state of extreme, but pleasurable, exhaustion.” (p. 35)
- “The practice of spirit-possession is essentially social in nature. Rarely do individuals enter a possession state in solitude for their own personal benefit.” (p. 35)
- “Freedom of action and speech is considerably enhanced when a person becomes possessed.” (p. 37)
- “Demon-possession is more often than not a coping mechanism.” (p. 37)
- “Except in cases where clear psychopathology exists, and they are comparatively rare, individuals who experience possession do so (consciously or unconsciously) for their own benefit and for the benefit of their local social group.” (p. 38)

³⁴ For the sake of clarification Davies states (p. 26): “I assume that normally one person has one *persona*, his or her identity, or self, or personality, which are terms I will use synonymously, but for the most part I will use the term *persona*.”

- Raymond Prince (*Trance and Possession States*, 1966) believes that “instances of possession supply occasions for the tightening of the social structure of the society in question.” (p. 39)
- “A person possessed has immediate claim to temporary group leadership, a state of affairs that causes no difficulty in established cults.” (p. 39)
- “Because possessed persons enjoy an upward alteration in social status during the period of their possession, more often people of relatively low social status, marginal people, people in a condition of social oppression, choose to join possession-oriented groups.” (p. 39)
- Erika Bourguignon believes (*Possession*, 1976) “that possession trance is often a ‘search for compensation and self-respect among men humiliated in their daily lives.’” (p. 40)
- “Possession” can be differentiated from “religious trance” in this way: “Possession is an alteration in [one’s] identity; religious trance is an alteration in [one’s] perception.” (p. 117)

As to how widespread the phenomenon of possession has been, Davies notes that:

“Bourguignon discovered that 437 of the 488 separate societies she surveyed had belief in trance, or possession trance, or both. Trance experiences alone were found in 186, or 38 percent; both trance and possession trance in 116, or 24 percent; possession trance, which I term spirit or demon possession, in 251 or 52 percent. There were only 51 of the 488 societies without trance or possession belief and it should be noted that in some of these cases such beliefs may be held but for one reason or another were not reported in the ethnographic materials available to Bourguignon.” (p. 28)

Despite the fact (as I noted in an earlier footnote) that I do not perceive the New Testament as a collection of books reporting *historical* facts, Davies book *Jesus the Healer: Possession, Trance, and the Origins of Christianity* (cited earlier)—which presents the thesis that Jesus was primarily a healer rather than a teacher—makes some interesting comments about Jesus—as a *historical personage*—and I will begin my New Testament-related comments regarding altered states of consciousness by summarizing his perspective on Jesus—a perspective that he has basically borrowed from other scholars.

Davies states (p. 124):

In [Robert W.] Funk’s opinion [expressed in [*Parables and Presence: Forms of the New Testament Tradition*](#), 1982] the purpose of this odd and surprising discourse [i.e., the parables

that Jesus is believed to have said] is to change the consciousness of those who sympathetically heard it.^[35]

He quoted from Marcus Borg's [*Jesus: A New Vision*](#), 1988, p. 115—adding the emphasis, thusly (p. 125):

[Jesus] used the forms of wisdom to subvert conventional ways of seeing. His proverbs and *parables reversed ordinary perception, functioning to jolt his hearers out of their present "world," their present way of seeing reality.*

Davies noted (p. 128) that Bernard Brandon Scott ([*Hear Then the Parable*](#), 1990):

contends [that] Jesus' parables were intended to produce a result, a [*metanoia*](#), rather than to communicate an ideology.

And, Davies himself declared (p. 131):

If we take seriously what specialists in the study of Jesus' parables tell us over and over again, we see that they conclude, with lines of reasoning wholly unrelated to considerations of [[Milton H.\] Ericksonian](#) therapy [³⁶], that Jesus used parables to produce confusion, unstructuring, restructuring, receptivity. Given that his parables were spoken in reference to the reiterated metaphor "kingdom of God," [³⁷]they can best be understood to comprise part of a technique to

³⁵ A point that I would add here—and will comment on further later—is that parables invite *discussion* with others, and *that* fact can have extremely important implications.

³⁶ Davies went on (in the next paragraph) to note that "Ericksonian trance therapy is founded on the view that all human beings have unconscious knowledge, creativity, memory, and learning potential." The unconscious "is not considered [to be] a place of repressed horrors and uncontrollable drives. Rather, it is a resource that all people may tap into on occasion, but that people in a trance may access with much greater ease and facility."

³⁷ Although Davies primarily thinks of "kingdom of God" in terms of "dissociative trance," he adds (p. 149) that "the idea that Jesus announced the imminent arrival of the eschatological and apocalyptic kingdom of God can easily coexist with the realization that the kingdom of God should be understood as a form of dissociative trance access to unconscious creative functioning. Indeed, as the idea that Jesus was possessed by the spirit of God might be taken to support predictions that in the near future all of God's people might be so possessed, so the present experience labeled kingdom of God might have been taken to support predictions that the kingdom would arrive on earth, visible to all, in the near future. Many, perhaps the majority, of New Testament scholars agree that Jesus spoke of both a present and a future kingdom."

(I should note here that earlier (pp. 113 – 114) Davies had stated: "If Jesus believed himself able to free people from an experience of demonic rule, it would follow that he sought to enable people to experience divine rule. 'Divine rule' translates the Greek *basileia tou theou* which is usually translated 'kingdom of God.' As [John Dominic] Crossan puts it [in [*The Historical Jesus*](#), 1991], when using the term

enable his associates to attain and experience a state called the kingdom of God and not to communicate to them an ideology *about* the kingdom of God.

And (p. 134):

Jesus seems to have spoken in a way that was intended to allow individuals access to unconscious functioning.

Davies may or may not be correct in his assessment of Jesus as a historical personage, but my interest here is not so much in historical correctness, so far as the New Testament is concerned, but in *ideas* that can be gleaned from that collection of books that can form the basis of a new religion—one relevant for the present. In a later section (Section 7) I will discuss the role that alternate states of consciousness *might* play in the new religion, but the purpose of the present section is to “mine” the New Testament for ideas—in this case, relevant to the new religion that I am proposing.

What I would point out regarding the comments that Davies makes about Jesus and ASC is that—although I find them highly interesting—they are ideas that are based on *inferential reasoning* by others and himself—so that, strictly speaking, they are *inadmissible* for my presentation here!

In turning now to *actual references* to alternate states of consciousness in the New Testament (while also attempting to keep my discussion relatively brief), I will begin by quoting from two of the letters attributed to [Paul of Tarsus](#), beginning with [Galatians](#). I should first note, however, that given my interest in creating a religion of current relevance, but also one inspired by the New Testament, I wish to be able to find the answers to two questions in that collection of books:

- *How* does one acquire an alternate state of consciousness (ASC)?
- What does the acquisition of such consciousness *do* for one (a question to which I will be providing *two* answers)?

It will be recalled from the discussion of Jesus above (based primarily on a book by Stevan L. Davies) that Jesus’s use of the parable in his “ministry” can be interpreted as having the effect of causing some hearers to achieve (for it *would be* an achievement!) an ASC—with the possibility that Jesus was *aware* of this possibility, and spoke in parables with the conscious *intention* of helping those listening to acquire an ASC. But this is, of course, “mere” speculation, and I am more interested in whether *other* portions of the New Testament provide any information

kingdom of God ‘what we are actually talking about is power and rule, a state much more than a place, or, if ou will, a place only because of a state. And, lest one ambiguity replace another, state means way of life or mode of being, not nation or empire.’”

regarding *how* one might achieve an ASC. My answer: My search of the New Testament has resulted in the conclusion that **it contains no answer to that question!**

The New Testament *does*, however, provide answers to the second question above, and below I will identify three of the relevant passages and offer some commentary on them—beginning, as I noted above, with [Galatians 5:13 – 23](#):

¹³ You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh^[a]; rather, serve one another humbly in love. ¹⁴ For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: “Love your neighbor as yourself.”^[b] ¹⁵ If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.

¹⁶ So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. ¹⁷ For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever^[c] you want. ¹⁸ But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law.

¹⁹ The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God.

²² But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.

In this particular translation the word “flesh” is used, but in other translations (e.g., my *Good News Bible*) the term “human nature” is used instead. My comment on the use of the word “flesh” (or the term “human nature”) is that we moderns know that Paul was really referring to one’s *socialized* nature, not his *human* nature—a claim for which researchers at, e.g., Berkeley’s [Greater Good Science Center](#) have been developing evidence (to say nothing of relevant primatological research by scientists such as [Frans de Waal](#)).

Paul’s use of (what is translated as) “walk by the Spirit”³⁸ is, note, rather unclear in meaning. I assume that he was referring to Spirit *possession*, given that he seems to have been clearly referring to an ASC as what *enabled* one to have the characteristics listed (which, note, all appear in my “virtues list” in Section 3), but given that I need to rely on translations of Galatian, I cannot offer a definitive judgment on this matter here.

In [I Corinthians 12:1 – 11](#) Paul wrote this:

Now about the gifts of the Spirit, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. ²
You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to

³⁸ My *Good News Bible* has nothing that resembles this phrase in verse 19!

mute idols. ³ Therefore I want you to know that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, “Jesus be cursed,” and no one can say, “Jesus is Lord,” except by the Holy Spirit.

⁴ There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work.

⁷ Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸ To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹ to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰ to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, ^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ^[b] ¹¹ All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Again, we have ambiguity here in the phrases “gifts of the Spirit” and “manifestations of the Spirit”—in the sense that Paul is not *clearly* referring to Spirit *possession* here, but merely *implies* that he is. Also, his list of “gifts” is of little interest to the modern educated/intelligent reader, and the use of the “he” pronoun might offend some females.

Finally, the [gospel of John](#)—likely composed in the 90 – 100 CE time frame, but composed in two or three stages—has references to the [paraclete](#) (meaning “advocate” or “helper”), as follows:³⁹

- John 14:15 – 17

¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever— ¹⁷ the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be ^[a] in you.”

- John 14:25 – 26

²⁵ “All this I have spoken while still with you. ²⁶ But the Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.”

- John 15:26

²⁶ “When the Advocate comes, whom I will send to you from the Father—the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father—he will testify about me.”

³⁹ Given that this gospel was written several decades after Paul wrote his letters, one suspects that the writer of this gospel was reflecting Paul’s concept of Jesus rather than basing his claims on what Jesus had said on more substantial sources. Put another way, it is highly unlikely that Jesus actually said the words attributed to him in this gospel!

- John 16:7 – 8

⁷ But very truly I tell you, it is for your good that I am going away. Unless I go away, the Advocate will not come to you; but if I go, I will send him to you. ⁸ When he comes, he will prove the world to be in the wrong about sin and righteousness and judgment:"

The speaker in all of these four cases is said to be Jesus himself, stating that when Jesus “goes away,” he will still be with them in a sense—in the form of what is variously referred to as an Advocate, Helper, or Holy Spirit.

Note that in this case there is no suggestion of Spirit *possession*—with its various “fruits” (identified by Paul).⁴⁰ Rather, the Spirit in this case is a source of (creative?) ideas (that will help them live lives pleasing to God?).

What is particularly interesting about these passages is that they imply that just as Jesus was *the* authority for his followers while still with them (*rather than [Torah](#) and the [Prophets](#) being their authorities!*), so will be the Holy Spirit their only authority *after* Jesus “goes away”! Given that the “commands” given in the Bible are typically interpreted as applicable not only to those who heard them initially, but people thereafter, what this passage suggests for us today is that **one can—and should!—discard one’s Bible (as an authoritative source**⁴¹—unless one wishes to retain it for, e.g., its *literary* value!). This is precisely what NeWFism does (“NeWFism being the name that I give to the new religion; see Sections 6 and 7 below)!

Such a conclusion is calculated to make members of the clergy shake in their boots, for where would they be without their Bibles?!!

⁴⁰ This fact lends some support to the view that the writer of the gospel of John may have used a source other than Paul.

⁴¹ Which does not, however, preclude one from allowing the Bible to “[author](#)” oneself (to refer to a concept associated with theologian Delwin Brown).

Section 4. Participatory Meetings

Given that the concept of participatory meetings is central to the new religion, and that I regard the religion as having its inspiration in the New Testament, I use this section to provide a New Testament basis for participatory meetings. And as that subject has been discussed so well by Brian Anderson in his “[Discovering Participatory Church Meetings](#),” I have decided to devote the entire first part of this section to that paper by him,⁴² that paper then followed by some of my comments on the matter:

Discovering Participatory Church Meetings

By [Brian Anderson](#)

The traditional Protestant worship service today strongly resembles a show business performance. In both we find ushers, programs, music, costumes, lighting, a chorus, a stage, a script, an audience, and a master of ceremonies. (Christian Smith, [Going To The Root](#), Herald Press, p.88.) The congregation sits passively as the audience while the pastor performs. When the congregation is permitted to participate in the meeting, they are restricted to singing in unison, antiphonal readings, dropping money into the offering plate, and taking notes during the sermon. The ordained clergy are expected to perform all significant ministry. Meanwhile, ninety-nine percent of God's people attend worship services Sunday after Sunday for years on end, without ever contributing any true spiritual ministry to the body of gathered believers.

Is this the way God intended for His church to meet? Can the traditional model of church meetings be found in the pages of Scripture? It is my conviction that our tradition which expects the laity to remain spectators while the clergy conduct the “show” cannot be found in the pages of our New Testament, but is instead a serious aberration from the model revealed in the word of God. Rather, the New Testament describes the body of Christ as meeting in a manner in which every believer has the potential of contributing to the building up of the congregation in some significant way.

Historical Background of Church Meetings

In order for us to grasp the flavor of New Testament church meetings, we must first understand the nature of Jewish synagogue meetings, because they provide the necessary historical context. The apostles of Christ who planted the earliest Christian churches were Jews who had

⁴² I have not sought his permission to do so, not knowing how to contact him. I would like to think, however, that Anderson would feel honored by my using his paper in this eBook. I should note that the only modification that I have introduced into Anderson's paper is to add links.

participated in synagogue meetings all their lives. No doubt, these meetings influenced the way early Christians gathered.

Synagogue worship allowed great freedom and participation. Philip Schaff has aptly noted, “As there was no proper priesthood outside of Jerusalem, any Jew of age might get up to read the lessons, offer prayer, and address the congregation.” (Philip Schaff, [*History Of The Christian Church*](#), Hendrickson, 1:459.) Indeed, we find Jesus constantly teaching in the synagogues on the Sabbath, (Lu.4:18-30; Mt.4:23; 13:54-58; Mk.1:21; Jn.18:20) even though he was neither a Levitical priest nor the ruler of a synagogue. Moreover, those who spoke in the synagogue meetings were not “pre-screened” as to what they were going to say, for Paul, directly upon his conversion, preached in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God to a group of hostile Jews (Acts 9:20).

Furthermore, Paul used the synagogue as his strategic starting point when evangelizing new cities because of this freedom to participate. On the Sabbath, he would enter a synagogue, and when opportunities for teaching and exhortation were given, would preach Jesus as the Christ. It was in the synagogue that Paul spoke in such a way that many of the residents of Iconium believed (Acts 14:1), that the Bereans received the word with great eagerness (Acts 17:10-12), and where he reasoned every Sabbath day in Corinth, trying to persuade Jews and Greeks (Acts 18:4). Indeed, the format of synagogue worship was so free that even strangers were permitted to bring a word of exhortation (Acts 13:14-41). Synagogue worship encouraged open participation. It is no accident that the meetings of the early Christians followed suit.

Kevin Giles in his book [*Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians*](#) writes insightfully about the relationship between the synagogue and early house church meetings:

In the larger and more institutionalised synagogues we know that the main function of the ruler of the synagogue was to preside over services and to encourage the participation of those present. This is likely to have been the way the first leaders of house-churches functioned. The early Christians avoided the title used by Jews (ruler of the synagogue) and chose instead the neutral, but equally appropriate term *episkopos* [overseer]; yet they continued to hold that the chief duty of those who presided over assemblies was to facilitate widespread participation and not do everything themselves. If so, then it could be that in the new house-churches, where the Holy Spirit gave new life and dynamism, such persons found it was more their lot to limit participation than to encourage it! (Ken Giles, *Patterns of Ministry Among the First Christians*, Collins Dove, p.37.)

Spiritual Gifts in Church Meetings

In a previous chapter, we saw that the biblical purpose for which the church gathers is to edify one another. So, exactly how should we accomplish this? In most churches, the pastor bears

almost the entire responsibility for edifying the saints, because he is the one who speaks most (or even exclusively) when the church assembles. Indeed, John Owen, probably the greatest of the Puritan theologians of the 17th century wrote, “on this office [the pastor] and the discharge of it he [Christ] hath laid the whole weight of the order, rule, and edification of his church . . .” (author’s emphasis). The Reformers of the 16th century, the Puritans of the 17th century, as well as most Christians of the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries also embraced this view. But we must ask the question: Does the word of God establish this approach? On the contrary, 1 Corinthians 12-14 (the most lengthy section in the New Testament detailing principles underlying early church meetings) says a great deal about the ministry of the many, but says nothing about the ministry of only one man when the church meets!

In 1 Corinthians 12 we find an abundance of teaching about the ministry of all believers. For example, in verses 4-6 Paul states that there are varieties of gifts, ministries and effects. Furthermore, he states in verse 6 that “God works all things in all persons.” In verse 7 He informs us, “But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” Again in verse 11 we read, “But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills.” In verse 14 Paul emphatically states that “the body is not one member, but many.” (The way most churches meet, one would have thought the passage reads, “the body is not many members, but one!”) Furthermore, in verses 15-25 the apostle goes on to explain that every person has a vital function within the church. All members are needed; none is unimportant. In light of this biblical teaching, how can we justify the idea that when we assemble, only the pastor may use his gifts while the rest of the body remains passive and silent?

In 1 Corinthians 14 the same truth emerges. In verse 1 Paul urges the entire church earnestly to desire spiritual gifts, but especially the gift of prophecy, because one who prophesies edifies the whole church (vs.5). In verse 26 he describes the church meeting as one in which each one has a psalm, teaching, revelation, tongue or interpretation. At the very least, this passage indicates that when the early church assembled, every believer had the opportunity to contribute to the edification of the whole body. Some bible scholars believe that in this verse Paul is rebuking the participatory manner in which the Corinthians held their church meetings. On the contrary, Paul does not command the Corinthians to stop meeting in a participatory manner. Rather, in verses 27-31 he gives guidelines for meetings which, though they establish order, still require participation by many! Paul’s only corrective in verse 26, is his statement, “Let all things be done for edification.” In other words, whenever anyone in the church contributes, he must do so with the intent that what he contributes will edify the rest.

In verse 27 Paul allows two or three persons to bring a message in tongues, as long as these messages are interpreted. In verse 29 he informs the church that they should “let two or three prophets speak, and let the others pass judgment.” In verse 31 Paul teaches, “for you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all may be exhorted.” In view of this, and the fact that Paul has been emphasizing the superiority of prophecy over tongues in church meetings all

the way through the chapter, and that he does not repeat “at the most” after “let two or three prophets speak,” as he does in the case of tongues (vs. 27), Paul’s reference to two or three prophets speaking should probably be understood as two or three at a minimum. His teaching in 1 Corinthians 14 describes a church meeting in which all have the opportunity of participating, either through a song, a teaching, or some other spiritual gift.

This practice may seem impossible in light of the fact that many churches today have anywhere from 200 to 10,000 members. Truly, in a church of that size, it would be impossible to provide an opportunity in which all could participate. We must remember, however, that the early church met almost exclusively in homes (Rom.16:5; Col.4:15). In that setting, where the number of believers could not easily exceed forty or fifty people, the apostle Paul’s remarks are much more intelligible. Jon Zens has insightfully written, “It seems to me that we have made normative that for which there is no Scriptural warrant (emphasis on one man’s ministry), and we have omitted that for which there is ample Scriptural support (emphasis on one another).” (Jon Zens, *Baptist Reformation Review*, “Building Up The Body: One Man or One Another?” Vol.10, No.2, p.117.) William Barclay, though unreliable as a theologian, has written insightfully on the spirit of a church meeting as pictured in 1 Corinthians 14:

There is no more interesting section in the whole letter than this, for it sheds a flood of light on what an early church service was like. There was obviously great freedom and an informality about it. . . it must remain true that if a man has a message to give his fellow men no ecclesiastical rules and regulations should be able to stop him giving it. It is a mistake to think that only the professional ministry can ever bring God’s truth to men. There was obviously a flexibility about the order of service in the early Church. Everything was informal enough to allow any man who felt that he had a message to give to give it. It may well be that we set far too much store on dignity and order nowadays, and have become the slaves of orders of service. The really notable thing about an early Church service must have been that almost everyone came feeling that he had both the privilege and the obligation of contributing something to it. A man did not come with the sole intention of being a passive listener; he came not only to receive but to give. (William Barclay, [*The Letters To The Corinthians*](#), Westminster Press, p.134-135.)

Many Christians today ignore the teaching in 1 Corinthians 12-14 because they believe that the gifts of prophecy and tongues have ceased with the closing of the New Testament canon. While a wide diversity of opinion exists in the church today about these gifts, all Christians believe that the singing of psalms and teaching should still occur in the meetings of the church (1Cor.14:26). Thus, even if a large segment of the church believes that tongues and prophecy have ceased, they must still grapple with the participatory spirit in the early church in which any could contribute a song or teaching, among other spiritual gifts.

Other Christians believe that though 1 Corinthians 14 does suggest that the church at Corinth met in a participatory manner, it does not serve as a model for us today, because it was spiritually immature and in need of correction from the apostle in many respects. When Paul writes to them, however, he first describes their church meetings as “each one having a psalm, a teaching, etc.,” and then goes on to give them the overarching guideline for everything that takes place in their meetings—“let all things be done for edification” (1Cor.14:26). If the Corinthians were in error in conducting their meetings in a participatory manner, surely Paul would have taken the opportunity in this letter to set them straight. But this is the very thing that he does not do. Although Paul does establish judicious guidelines so that their meetings are conducted in a proper and orderly manner (vs. 40), he does not prohibit mutual participation, but instead encourages it (“let two or three prophets speak,” “let the others pass judgment;” and “you can all prophesy one by one”).

Others point out that in Paul’s later pastoral epistles in which he gives instructions concerning church order, teaching concerning open participation is notably absent. We must remember, however, that Paul writes the pastoral epistles to apostolic representatives (Timothy and Titus) regarding their particular responsibilities to the churches they served. We would expect Paul’s emphasis in the pastoral epistles to be different from his letters to entire churches. In his letters to churches, Paul directs the whole body as to their mutual responsibilities to one another; in his letters to particular individuals (Timothy and Titus) he directs them as to their particular responsibilities to the church. Thus, nothing in the pastoral epistles contradicts the full ministry of elders and the full ministry of the entire body.

Still others argue that Paul directs the Corinthian church to minister to one another because it didn’t have elders yet. They say that when the church had appointed elders, Paul’s instructions on mutual body ministry in the church gatherings would become obsolete as the elders took upon themselves the duty of edifying the church. This, however, is an argument from silence, the least convincing kind of all. Scripture never states that there were no elders in Corinth. On the contrary, in 1 Corinthians 16:15-16, Paul mentions the household of Stephanas as those who have devoted themselves for ministry to the saints, and the ones to whom the church should subject themselves. Though these individuals are not specifically identified as elders, Paul’s instructions indicate that they functioned as such. Furthermore, we have every reason to believe that the church at Corinth had elders, as this was the uniform practice of the churches that Paul planted (Acts 14:23; Tit. 1:5).

If 1 Corinthians was the only New Testament book in which all believers were taught to utilize their spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole, the above-mentioned objections might carry greater weight. The apostle Paul, however, teaches this same practice in other letters as well. For example, in Ephesians 4:15-16 he exhorts, “but speaking the truth in love we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each

individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.” In this passage Paul directs the entire church to speak the truth in love. Additionally, every individual Christian (each individual part) must work properly in order for the whole body to grow and build up itself in love. In other words, the edification of the whole body is not the responsibility of one man or a few men. Rather, it is the responsibility of all.

Again, in Romans 12:3-8, the apostle makes this point crystal clear. “For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith. For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. And since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let each exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.” Notice several things about this passage. First, God allots each Christian a measure of faith by which he exercises one or more spiritual gifts. Second, God gives different Christians various functions to perform within the body. Third, each Christian is responsible to exercise his gift. Fourth, the gifts Paul lists are those we would expect to see when the church meets: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leading, mercy. Thus, the biblical pattern is uniform—all God's people have the privilege and responsibility of employing their respective spiritual gifts in order to build up the whole church in Christ.

The apostle Peter echoes the sentiments of Paul as well. “As each one has received a special gift, employ it in serving one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. Whoever speaks, let him speak, as it were, the utterances of God; whoever serves, let him do so as by the strength which God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belongs the glory and dominion forever and ever” (1 Pet.4:10-11). Notice that Peter emphasizes that each believer has gifts, and that he is to employ them, or put them to work. Furthermore, these gifts are comprised of two basic kinds—speaking and serving gifts. Although believers can and should serve one another throughout the week in all kinds of situations, a natural place for believers to put speaking and serving gifts to work is in the meetings of the church. Would not a recipient of Peter's letter have immediately thought of the church meetings as the logical starting place in fulfilling this command? Is it not natural to assume that believers should employ their gifts when they assemble? Is that not what Paul is urging in 1 Corinthians 14 (especially verses 26-31)? Is there any reason to assume that Peter is not describing the church as gathered in 1 Peter 4:11-12? It is unlikely that someone would conclude that Peter wanted his readers to use their spiritual gifts exclusively at times other than church meetings unless he held a previous bias against mutual participation in church meetings.

Mutual Exhortation in Church Meetings

Not only is the body responsible to edify one another through the exercise of spiritual gifts when they gather, they are also to edify one another through mutual exhortation and encouragement.

In Hebrews 10:23-25, the Scriptures declare, “Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful; and let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another; and all the more, as you see the day drawing near.” Notice that this text describes the saints as assembling together. But exactly what are the saints supposed to do when they assemble together? The text does not leave us in doubt; the whole body is to stimulate one another to love and good deeds and encourage one another. Furthermore, no mention is made of the pastor performing this stimulating and encouraging ministry. Rather, Scripture says, let us stimulate and encourage. The author of Hebrews is urging the whole body to take up these duties. Often these verses are used to rebuke church members who miss an occasional meeting. However the intent of the passage is to warn professing Christians of “forsaking” (a strong word which means to desert once and for all) the gatherings of the saints and returning to the Old Covenant law, priesthood, and sacrifices.

It is a shame that this passage is used so often to browbeat church members into faithful attendance at the stated meetings of the church (which is not the original intent of the passage) but is not used to give direction to the functioning of the church when it has assembled (which is the intent of the passage). The text clearly links mutual exhortation and encouragement with the assembling of the saints. Our church traditions have misconstrued this text to mean, “let the pastor consider how he may stimulate the church to love and good deeds and encourage the rest of the body as he sees the day drawing near.” The author of Hebrews goes on to explain why it is so important for the church to exhort and encourage one another when they assemble. “For if we go on sinning willfully after receiving the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain terrifying expectation of judgment, and the fury of a fire which will consume the adversaries” (Heb.10:26-27).

The meaning of the passage is clear. The fire of hell awaits those who apostatize from the truth. Mutual encouragement and exhortation are the means the people of God must use to avoid apostasy. We neglect these means at our own peril. A dozen systematic theologies line the shelves of my personal library; I have consulted each and every one, and have yet to find one which mentions mutual exhortation as a primary means of the perseverance of the saints. Though mutual exhortation is a biblical means of perseverance, it is one which the church has neglected far too long. Mutual encouragement and exhortation then, according to God's Word, should occupy a central place in the activities of the gathered church. Surely, when one man (the pastor) performs all the exhorting and encouraging, the clear pattern of New Testament church meetings has been violated.

One Anothering in Church Meetings

Not only do we see participatory church meetings emphasized by the stress laid upon each believer to utilize his spiritual gift, and exhort one another when the church gathers, but we also find it in the more than fifty “one another” commands of the New Testament. Scripture enjoins believers to:

1. Love one another (John 13:34-35; 15:12,17; Rom.13:8; 1Thess.3:12; 1Thess.4:9; 2Thess.1:3; 1Pet.1:22; 1Pet.4:8; 1John 3:11; 1John 3:23; 1John 4:7,11,12; 2John 1:5)
2. Be devoted to one another (Rom.12:10)
3. Give preference to one another (Rom.12:10)
4. Be of the same mind toward one another (Rom.12:16; 15:5)
5. Not judge one another (Rom.14:13)
6. Pursue the things which make for the building up of one another (Rom.14:19)
7. Pursue the things which make for peace with one another (Rom.14:19)
8. Accept one another (Rom.15:7)
9. Admonish one another (Rom.15:14; Col.3:16)
10. Greet one another (Rom.16:16; 1Cor.16:20; 2Cor.13:12; 1Pet.5:14)
11. Wait for one another (1Cor.11:33)
12. Have the same care for one another (1Cor.12:25)
13. Serve one another (Gal.5:13)
14. Not challenge one another (Gal.5:26)
15. Not envy one another (Gal.5:26)
16. Show forbearance to one another (Eph.4:2)
17. Be kind to one another (Eph.4:32)
18. Forgive one other (Eph.4:32; Col.3:13)
19. Speak to one another (Eph.5:19)
20. Be subject to one another (Eph.5:21)

21. Regard one another as more important than yourself (Phil.2:3)
22. Not lie to one another (Col.3:9)
23. Bear with one another (Col.3:13)
24. Teach one another (Col.3:16)
25. Comfort one another (1Thess.4:18)
26. Encourage one another (1Thess.5:11; Heb.3:13; Heb.10:25)
27. Build up one another (1Thess.5:11)
28. Live in peace with one another (1Thess.5:13)
29. Seek after that which is good for one another (1Thess.5:15)
30. Stimulate one another to love and good deeds (Heb.10:24)
31. Not speak against one another (James 4:11)
32. Not complain against one another (James 5:9)
33. Confess your sins to one another (James 5:16)
34. Be hospitable to one another (1Pet.4:9)
35. Employ your spiritual gift in serving one another (1Pet.4:10)
36. Clothe yourself with humility toward one another (1Pet.5:5)
37. Have fellowship with one another (1John 1:7)

I have personally counted fifty-nine New Testament references to “one another” responsibilities. The critical question then becomes: when should the church obey these commands? Some may argue that we should obey these commands outside of the regular meetings of the church. However, how would a first century Christian have understood these commands? What better opportunity would he have to love, serve, admonish, exhort, fellowship, accept, greet, forbear, build up, encourage, comfort and teach other believers, than in the gatherings of the church? I readily admit that these one-another commands should be obeyed throughout the week, whenever believers are with each other. But obedience to them should certainly characterize the meetings of the church, which comprise our primary opportunities to meet with one another. I submit to you, that if we are to obey these New Testament “one-another” commands, it is important that interaction and open participation characterize our meetings. If the people of God assemble week after week, month after month, year in and year out, as silent spectators in clergy-dominated meetings, it is unlikely that they will consistently obey these commands.

Joint Sharing in Church Meetings

The New Testament Scriptures affirm that joint sharing should form another important activity in our church meetings. In 1 Peter 3:8, all are exhorted to be sympathetic toward one another. The Greek word translated “sympathetic” literally means “suffering or feeling the like with one another.” ([*The New Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*](#), Hendrickson, p.596.) It should come as no surprise, then, that Paul commands believers to “rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep” (Rom.12:15). Furthermore, he notes, “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it” (1Cor.12:26).

In order for us to obey Paul’s clear teaching, we must open up our meetings so that people can share their burdens, or rejoice together in God’s blessings. In many churches, if a brother comes to a meeting with a wonderful blessing from God he wants to share, he must scurry around after the meeting, in order to communicate it to five or six others before they drive home. Similarly, in most churches, if someone’s heart is breaking with sorrow, there is no place in the meeting for them to unburden their hearts and receive the prayer and ministry of the body. Why not open our meetings so that the whole church can rejoice with us in our blessings, and minister to us in our sufferings? In this way, all may be encouraged by the joyful, and minister to the sufferer.

Historical Decline of Church Meetings

As we have seen, New Testament church meetings abounded with openness and mutual participation. In this respect, they were very different from our one-man performances today. How have our churches drifted so far off track? What happened to cause the church to go from open participation to passive spectating? Like any new movement, the church began to gradually become more and more institutionalized shortly after its inception. In the second century, because of a fear of heresy from within and persecution from without, the authority of the bishop rose dramatically in the church. (Each local church was previously shepherded by a plurality of gifted servants called elders—Acts 20:28; 1 Pet.5:1-4). At the same time, these bishops began to retain an increased amount of the ministry which had previously belonged to the whole body. Slowly but surely, clergy-dominated meetings replaced the exciting and invigorating participatory meetings of the New Testament church.

The final blow came early in the fourth century, when [Emperor Constantine](#) in 313 issued the [Edict of Milan](#) which granted Christians freedom from persecution by making Christianity a legal religion of the State. After Constantine professed the Christian faith, he not only legalized Christianity, but paved the way for it to become Rome’s favored religion. During the years that followed, Constantine ordered many large church buildings built at public expense, began paying salaries to the bishops and presbyters of most congregations, and promoted many Christians to positions of prominence and prosperity. The small and simple church meetings held in homes gave way to large and complex meetings in state-funded “sanctuaries.” Prominent orators

preaching long and eloquent sermons took the place of ordinary believers sharing their heart-felt exhortations. Body participation gave way to professional eloquence; spontaneity to rigid structure. Eventually, the only way ordinary church members could participate in church meetings was to sing or chant in unison together.

Early in the 16th century [Martin Luther](#) recovered several key biblical doctrines which served to spearhead the Protestant Reformation. One of these was the “priesthood of all believers.” Luther held this doctrine, however, primarily in a private sense, rather than within the corporate body of Christ. For centuries the Roman Catholic church had taught that God’s people were dependent on the officially set apart clergy (priests) in order to receive God’s grace. Luther, on the other hand, taught that every believer could go directly to God through Christ to receive God’s grace for himself. In that respect, all believers had immediate access to God through the Spirit, and were all priests. Luther and the other reformers, however, did not implement the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in the meetings of the local church. They replaced the communion altar with the pulpit and the priest with the pastor, but clergy dominance and member passivity continued to dominate the meetings of the church. Such continues to be the case in most Protestant churches to this day.

Our Journey in Implementing Participatory Meetings

When I arrived at [Milpitas Bible Fellowship](#) in 1990, our meetings were fairly typical of most other churches. After thirty to forty minutes of worship, I would give the announcements, preach my sermon, and pronounce the closing benediction. We experienced little if any real interaction and mutual body ministry during our meetings. The whole church looked to me as its source of edification. When God began opening my eyes to the importance of participatory church meetings, my first reaction was one of fear. I was terrified at what might happen if I truly opened up the meetings for all of God’s people to minister. I feared our meetings would turn into bedlam if I gave all an opportunity to speak. I wrestled with these principles for some time until the strength of conviction overcame my fears.

In the Summer of 1996, we began implementing these principles. Our first step was to open up various homes during the week for “house church” meetings. These “house churches” functioned as small group meetings for believers where each could learn to interact, pray, encourage, exhort, and minister to one another. Almost everyone was enthused about these home meetings, although at first we were a bit unsure how to function in them.

After a few months, as we became more comfortable with these informal home meetings, we began introducing more participation into our Sunday gatherings. I informed the congregation that anyone could participate by reading Scripture, praying during a lull in our praise singing, or starting a song that was on their heart. I brought the podium down from the platform to the lower level so that I could be closer to the people, thereby encouraging mutual interaction. We

rearranged the chairs into concentric semi-circles so that we could look into one another's faces when speaking, instead of the back of someone's head. We bought a wireless microphone and began passing it around to those desiring to share what God had been doing in their lives or to encourage us by declaring what God had been teaching them from His Word. Sometimes these sessions included exhortations, admonitions, teachings, or the sharing of blessings or burdens. One woman revealed that she had recently been diagnosed with cancer. This allowed the whole church the opportunity to tangibly express their love and commitment by gathering around, laying hands on her, and praying. These changes felt a bit awkward at first. We had no previous model to guide us, and thus, felt a bit uncomfortable with them. Before long, however, many began contributing some very edifying insights and exhortations.

Furthermore we began opening up our meetings directly after the sermon for questions, comments, and insights from others. I was very hesitant about this new move, fearing that all doctrinal purity might be lost if everyone was permitted to comment from the Scriptures. On the contrary, this new aspect of our meetings proved especially enriching. Often someone would bring an insight that I had missed in my sermon preparation that would open up the text in an important way. At other times, people shared insights as to how they could personally apply the text under consideration. On still other occasions, someone would ask a question that many others had on their mind, but would not have voiced. Instead of producing doctrinal confusion, I found that the questions and comments enabled me to allay confusion by addressing the real issues which were perplexing the church.

On those rare occasions when someone stated something unbiblical, I was able to gently refocus the church by bringing them back to Scripture. Instead of producing chaos, I discovered that it fostered spiritual maturity, intimacy, and love for the brethren. In fact, by adding the time of questions and comments, the church was easily able to concentrate on the Word of God for well over an hour. Often this segment proved to be the most invigorating and helpful of the entire meeting. Whereas our previous meetings lasted about ninety minutes, the new participatory meetings usually took a minimum of two hours to complete. The consensus of the church, though, was that the quality of the meetings was well worth the additional time spent together. The new meetings began to spawn additional interaction among the people. Many began going out to eat after the meeting to spend more time together. Sometimes up to half of the church could be seen piling into a Taco Bell, Burger King, or McDonald's after a Sunday morning meeting to continue their discussion of the things of God.

I cannot overstate the importance of creating an atmosphere of freedom for body participation in the meetings of the church. When church members do nothing but sit, listen, and take notes week after week for years on end, they tend to stagnate spiritually. Spiritual growth requires us to flex our spiritual muscles and apply the truths we are learning. What good is it for our people to learn that God wants them to use their spiritual gifts, exhort one another, bear each other's

burdens, and rejoice with those who rejoice if we make no provision for them to do that when the church meets?

Having been involved in participatory church meetings now for almost two years, I know that I would find the traditional model stifling and unsatisfying. God has proven over and over that as we step out in obedience to apply the patterns we see in His Word, His blessings are sure to follow.

Conclusion

In most churches today church meetings look more like a professional performance than the family of God meeting under the headship of Christ to edify one another. It is time for the church of Jesus Christ to return to its New Testament roots. One of the slogans of the Protestant reformers was “[always reforming](#).” One area in which the contemporary church desperately needs ongoing reform is that of providing mutual ministry and participation in its meetings. Will you take up the challenge in so far as you have influence in your local church to seek reformation in its practices in order to conform to Scripture?

Now for *My* Contribution:

(I should note that except for some formatting changes that I have made, this is part of a paper that I wrote several months ago. As such, some of the statements that I make below may be in conflict with the main body of this eBook, but I have thought it wise not to “tinker” with it.)

Introductory Comments

If one has been a lifelong churchgoer, and imagines asking a fellow churchgoer why that person attends church, one might expect to get the following general (non-) response:

"I'm here because,

"I'm here because,

"I'm here because

"I'm here,"⁴³

That is, for most churchgoers, their churchgoing seems to be more a matter of habit than the result of purposeful decision-making. Given this, further imaginary probing might elicit responses such as the following:

⁴³To paraphrase Thorstein Veblen, [An Inquiry Into the Nature of Peace and the Terms of its Perpetuation](#). New York: B. W. Huebsch, 1919, p. 60. First published by The Macmillan Company in 1917.

- “Going to church ‘religiously’ will earn me ‘points;’ and if I earn enough points, I will not be spending eternity in an excessively warm place.”
- “The pastor has a wonderful personality, and tells amusing stories; I really like him!”
- “The pastor’s sermons have good intellectual content: they are provocative, well-organized, and even well-delivered. I’d much rather listen to him than to Wolf Blitzer!”
- “The building in which services are held is awe-inspiring; I need to get away from the ugliness around me by regularly attending services at _____ church. Besides, there is no admission charge!”
- “I’m single, and looking for a chick to date, and perhaps eventually marry. As I’m not much of a drinker, I lack an opportunity to meet girls in bars—and would be suspicious of the morals of the girls that I would meet there anyway. If I weren’t so cheap, I’d use an internet dating service, but I *am* cheap, and church gives me an inexpensive opportunity to meet the sort of person I think I’d like to have as a wife.”
- “I haven’t had a chance to play my clarinet since high school days, but because the church has a small orchestra, it has given me an opportunity to get back in the swing of things with my clarinet. Besides, it’s fun to be with the others in that group.”
- “The church’s choir gives me a chance to sing solos. I love to perform, because it makes me feel important: And I absolutely love it when after the service someone compliments me on how beautiful my voice is.”
- “At my place of employment I’m just another grunt, but the church I attend has all sorts of committees, and I’m the chairman of one of them. Being the ‘boss’ for a change makes me feel like I’m a human after all, not just a cog in a big machine.”
- “I’m in such a habit of going to church (from my days as a child), that I just don’t feel right if I skip going to church on Sundays.”
- “Going to church gives me a chance to get away from my ‘job’ as a homemaker, and socialize a little.”
- “Given that I’m an alderman in the local government, it’s important that I be seen going to church. Thus, before and after services I try to shake hands and say ‘Hello’ to as many people as I can. That should help me get elected next time around!”
- “I’m from a large family, and most members of the family live here locally. Everyone in the family goes to church, and I would stand out like a ‘sore thumb’ if I didn’t follow suit. In fact, the others would start ‘hounding’ me if I didn’t attend church regularly. And if I stopped going entirely? Well, they would disown me, that’s for sure!”
- “I like to go to church and get involved with church activities because that’s a way of making important contacts. For example, if I can make friends with a plumber who goes

to my church, perhaps he won't 'screw' me if I call upon him for his services."

It is perhaps somewhat cynical of me to offer such a list, but what a list such as this can do for us is to cause us to "rethink church"—to even, for that matter, ask: Should we *abandon* the churches in favor of some alternative; and if so, what might that alternative be?

In addressing that question, the logical starting point is to ask—in the case of "Christianity"—what that religion should be "about;" and the "aboutness" of Christianity can be expressed in either/or terms, using the words "orthodoxy" and "orthopraxy." This is not to say that every "Christian" falls neatly into one of these two categories—for such is certainly not the case. Still, this distinction is a highly important one with Christianity.

The *former* word (*orthodoxy*) refers to a concept of Christianity that holds that what makes a person a "Christian" is that s/he accepts⁴⁴ certain *factual claims* as "true"—"facts" such as:

- God is real, not just a human invention.
- Jesus was born of a virgin.⁴⁵
- Jesus was (and is) the (one and only) Son of God.
- Jesus died (on a cross) a sacrificial death (so that a *causal* explanation of Jesus's death would be out of place, for Jesus purposely *chose* to die—"for our sins").
- Several days after His death, Jesus came back to life (i.e., was "resurrected").
- Several days after His resurrection, He ascended to Heaven—to be with His Father (i.e., God).
- Etc.

The latter word—*orthopraxy*—refers to a concept of "Christian" whose focus is on *behavior*: a "Christian" is one who strives to be a "good" person. One attempt to express what it means to be a "good" person is the Boy Scout oath:

On my honor, I will do my best
To do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law;
To help other people at all times;
To keep myself physically strong, mentally awake and morally straight.

⁴⁴ *Actually* accepts, not just *claims* to.

⁴⁵ Michael Dowd, in his [*Thank God for Evolution: How the Marriage of Science and Religion Will Transform Your Life and Our World*](#) (New York: Viking, p. 2007) lists (pp. 262 – 363) 24 instances of claimed virgin births in the ancient world.

And, especially, the “[Scout Law](#)” (referred to in the oath):

A Scout is **Trustworthy**.

A Scout tells the truth. He is honest, and he keeps his promises. People can depend on him.

A Scout is **Loyal**.

A Scout is true to his family, friends, Scout leaders, school, and nation.

A Scout is **Helpful**.

A Scout cares about other people. He willingly volunteers to help others without expecting payment or reward.

A Scout is **Friendly**.

A Scout is a friend to all. He is a brother to other Scouts. He offers his friendship to people of all races and nations, and respects them even if their beliefs and customs are different from his own.

A Scout is **Courteous**.

A Scout is polite to everyone regardless of age or position. He knows that using good manners makes it easier for people to get along.

A Scout is **Kind**.

A Scout knows there is strength in being gentle. He treats others as he wants to be treated. Without good reason, he does not harm or kill any living thing.

A Scout is **Obedient**.

A Scout follows the rules of his family, school, and troop. He obeys the laws of his community and country. If he thinks these rules and laws are unfair, he tries to have them changed in an orderly manner rather than disobeying them.

A Scout is **Cheerful**.

A Scout looks for the bright side of life. He cheerfully does tasks that come his way. He tries to make others happy.

A Scout is **Thrifty**.

A Scout works to pay his own way and to help others. He saves for the future. He protects and conserves natural resources. He carefully uses time and property.

A Scout is **Brave**.

A Scout can face danger although he is afraid. He has the courage to stand for what he thinks is right even if others laugh at him or threaten him.

A Scout is **Clean**.

A Scout keeps his body and mind fit and clean. He chooses the company of those who live by high standards. He helps keep his home and community clean.⁴⁶

A Scout is **Reverent**.

A Scout is reverent toward God. He is faithful in his religious duties. He respects the beliefs of others.

Note that I offer the above interpretation of “orthopraxy” not as a definitive one but, rather, as simply one possibility. Personally, I disagree with none of the above points,⁴⁷ but would caution one against nationalism—given that the leaders of many (most?) countries—and certainly ours—often engage in nefarious activities (such as rigging elections, torturing “dissidents,” assassinating leaders, etc.). (See William [Blum’s web site](#) for an abundance of evidence regarding this relative to the United States—including access to several chapters from his *Killing Hope: US Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*.⁴⁸)

Note also that orthopraxy can also be thought of as a *type* of orthodoxy, in that those who give an orthopraxy interpretation to “Christian” hold the *belief* that being a “Christian” involves primarily (a) having certain behavioral goals as one’s ideal, and (b) striving to live by those behavioral goals. Those who accept the orthopraxy version of “Christian” would be expected to differ somewhat in the *specific* behavioral goals that they would identify as particularly “Christian,” but it is likely that *all* such Christians would agree that the Golden Rule⁴⁹ best summarizes their behavioral goal—at least as a first approximation.

Of these two versions of “being a Christian” the only one that has a firm Biblical basis is the latter—orthopraxy—one: It is well known that (a) Jesus was a Jew, (b) as such would have not only learned many stories (about Noah, Moses, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, etc.), but learned that what being a Jew primarily involved was knowing and following (to the best of one’s ability) the Law.⁵⁰ Indeed, so oriented was Jesus to the Law that (c) he came to realize that the Law, as it was being promulgated in his time, was an rather distorted version of the True Law: The

⁴⁶ The scouting organization has traditionally interpreted being “morally straight” as not being a homosexual, but have recently changed their views on this matter; see [this](#), for example.

⁴⁷ Our son was a scout (and I accompanied him on camping trips), and I believe that he found his scouting experience both valuable and enjoyable.

⁴⁸ Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1995 (but updated several times since then).

⁴⁹ One should *not* do unto others that which one would not done to oneself, and *should* do unto others—whenever possible—that which one *would* like done onto oneself.

⁵⁰ For a fairly lengthy discussion of the Law, see pp. 8 – 26 in my “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#).”

Judaism of his time was giving the ancient *covenant* concept an *individualistic* interpretation, and therefore teaching a “*blame* the victim” version of the Law, when it should have been teaching a “*help* the victim” one. The gospels make clear that Jesus was in an antagonistic relationship with the religious leaders of his day, and this was the basis for that antagonism. (The writer of *Matthew* used the word “hypocrisy” to express this conflict—see, e.g., *Matthew* 23:14, 15⁵¹).

Having concluded that, from a Biblical standpoint (the relevant one, of course!), being a “Christian”—in the sense of a follower of Jesus⁵²—involves having an *orthopraxy* orientation, three questions arise:

- Would it be of value for “Christians” so defined (or, as I prefer, “Jesuan”) to meet with one another on a regular basis?
- Do church “services” (actually, “meetings” would be a more appropriate term⁵³) provide enough value to Jesuans to make their attendance of those meeting worthwhile?
- If not, should Jesuans attempt to “fix” existing meetings, or would it be more sensible for them to simply abandon the churches and initiate meetings more likely to hold value for them?

Let me address each of these questions in turn. (Given that I think it of great value for Jesuans to meet on a regular basis, it should not be surprising that I will in fact be offering an alternate type of meeting below for Jesuans to consider.)

Can Meeting With Other Jesuans Be of Value?

There is an [anonymous paper](#) available on the internet that deals with “why, where, and how Christians [should] meet,” and I will begin my discussion here by making reference to that

⁵¹ Verses 13 – 28 constitute a “diatribe,” a bitter denunciation.

⁵² I prefer “Jesuan” to “Christian” because the [latter](#) is a *theological* concept, not a *historical* one. It asserts that Jesus was the expected “Messiah” of Judaism—which is a theological interpretation of Jesus’s life. It is a *title* given to Jesus (perhaps including by some of his contemporaries), and as such was not a part of his *name*. Thus, it is very possible that Jesus would be offended by, e.g., the title of William T. Stead’s old (1894) [If Christ Came to Chicago](#). I should add, however, that it’s highly likely that he would also disapprove of “Jesuan” (!), given that his self-perception seemingly (using the oldest sources as our guide) was that he was merely a human who was attempting to do that which would be pleasing in God’s eyes.

⁵³ A friend and I attended a Quaker meeting several months ago, and it was made clear to us then that “service” is something that Quakers engage in *after* their meetings! Good point!

paper.⁵⁴

The author begins by referring to “[the Round Church](#),” a “quaint circular Norman building with a medieval oblong tacked on to it,” in Cambridge, England. He notes that the building had become “desperately over-crowded,” which fact forced those attending the church to rethink—“from the Bible”—such issues as “the purpose of a building, the meaning of worship, the purpose of meeting—and the nature of the church.” He continues: “This is more than the story of one church; it has lessons and relevance for every church.” Thereby, the author raises the expectations of the reader—especially if the reader is a Jesuan.

The author then “gets ahead of himself,” however, by noting that commercial plans that had been developing for “a redundant city-centre church, St Andrew the Great,” collapsed, thereby providing the congregation of the Round Church an opportunity to acquire it and “refurbish it for their own use.” Presumably, the building acquired not only had the advantage of a desirable location, but “could provide seating for over 700 people, and [had] ten ancillary rooms for other activities.” This building, once refurbished, would thereby provide the congregation with a meeting place that would accommodate them all at the same time.

Next, the author notes that the first question that confronted the congregation was: Why meet on Sundays? They answered that question by saying that it was to “worship God,” but then expanded that answer by affirming that “worship is to do with approaching and responding to God rightly, putting him in his rightful place and giving him his due.”

He continues by noting that there is an important difference between the Old Testament concept of worship and the New Testament one. In the Old Testament the “right” approach was (a) tied to a particular place (i.e., the Temple), (b) having particular furniture, with (c) certain people associated with that place, (d) wearing particular clothing, but (e) after particular preparation, (f) using particular ceremonies and offerings (g) at particular times. The author adds, however, that in the Old Testament “there was always a tension,” always “a sense that the revelation was not yet complete, and that all the cultic worship of the Temple was pointing to something else.” (I would doubt that many Jews would agree with this interpretation of the Old Testament—which label they would, of course, reject in favor of “Hebrew Scriptures.”)

The author next declares that when “Jesus [the] Christ” appeared, he “made it clear at once that his coming had changed everything. No longer was the Temple to be the focus of true worship.” The author evidently bases this assertion on the statements in the gospel of *John* (4:21 – 24) where Jesus is quoted as stating that God is spirit, and those who worship God must therefore worship in spirit and truth (the meaning of which is not self-evident—although the author is seemingly oblivious of that fact).

⁵⁴ The web site is for *The Briefing: An International Evangelical Monthly*. The paper itself was reproduced from [Evangelicals Now](#), February, 1993.

Rather than attempt to clarify what “spirit and truth” might mean, the author launches into a discussion of meetings. He begins by noting that only in *Acts* 13:2, in the New Testament, is the “worship” language of the Old Testament used. “Instead,” he asserts, “it uses the sort of language that immediately follows the quotation we have just considered [that of *Hebrews* 10:19 – 22] from Hebrews: ‘Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near’ (Heb 10:24, 25).”⁵⁵ However, he continues by asserting that the “key New Testament word for Christians meeting together is edification, not worship”—noting that “edification” is a “building word”—in the sense of having the same root as “edifice,” I assume he means—but in a “people” sense. That is, although “edification” is usually given an *intellectual* interpretation—one is “edified” by gaining new knowledge, and especially new knowledge that is enlightening—in the case of Christian meetings, the purpose of the meetings is the “building up” of those attending. What this “building up” presumably does for those meeting is that helps them show love—and in general “do good”—during their lives while *not* in Christian meetings.

Put another way, the purpose of “Christian meetings” is to “recharge the batteries” of those attending, so that when they leave the meetings, they will not merely (or only) be better prepared to cope in “the world,” but be so highly *motivated* that they will eagerly engage in loving behaviors toward everyone they encounter—and even beyond. This is not to say that no *learning* (of *what* to do, and *how* to do it) would occur during “Christian meetings.” But the *primary* goal of “Christian meetings” should be to give those attending the *enthusiasm* and *energy* they need to do God’s will in the world. Indeed, if those attending gain those qualities as a result of their attendance, the question of coping will never even arise!

The author seems to emphasize this point by stating that “if we are not already worshipping God when we meet together in church, that meeting will be in serious trouble. But it [i.e., “worshipping God”] is not the primary purpose of our meeting. Nor for the Christian can the term ‘time of worship’ have any meaning, other than referring to his or her entire life. Only pagans have ‘a time of worship’ in any other sense.

As to the *particular nature* of “Christian meetings,” the author notes: “There are no set New Testament patterns . . . , but there are many hints about the sort of things that should characterize them. For example, Christian meetings are to be Spirit-filled (Eph 5:18); Bible-centred (Col 3:16); congregational (Heb 10:24); varied (1 Cor 14:26); characterized by praise and thanksgiving (Eph 5:18); intelligible (1 Cor 14); done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40), and

⁵⁵ This passage reads as follows in my *Good News Bible* (New York: American Bible Society, 1976): “Let us be concerned for one another, to help one another to show love and to do good. Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer.” For the meaning of “Day of the Lord,” go to one of the internet search sites, which will take you to [this one](#), for example.

they should include the breaking of bread (1 Cor 11) and teaching and intercessions (Act 2:42).”

He then directs attention to the building that is to be refurbished, and asks: “What do these [i.e., the above attributes] mean for our building? Clearly, audibility and visibility are very important in any building in which Christians meet. That is not just so that the pastor/teacher should be audible and visible, but so that members of the congregation should be able to see and hear each other.” In asserting that members of the congregation should be able to “hear each other,” the author seems to mean that it is while they are *reading responsively* and *singing* that they should be able to “hear each other”—for his paper gives no indication that he thinks that they should be *talking* to each other during meetings (i.e., “Christian meetings”). Presumably, he believes that talking with other congregants should be confined to periods *other than* those of “Christian meetings” (e.g., during a “coffee hour,” or while one is at home, and has a “Christian” guest).

Audibility and visibility, then, are the primary characteristics that a church building should have—and the author seems to mean by this that those present during a given “Christian meeting” will fall into two basic categories: (a) a clergy member who will read from Holy Scripture and deliver a sermon, and (b) congregants who will be able to see that person clearly, and also hear—and understand—what they person says. Assumedly, there would also be an organist and a choir present, and they would be heard at their appointed times; but their contribution to the meeting would be too minor to merit attention. The principal role of such people would be to listen to the minister along with everyone else present.

Should the building have any characteristics in addition to audibility and visibility? “But what about a sense of awe and transcendence?,” he asks. “Should not a building suited for Christian meetings convey a sense of the numinous to the spirits of those who gather? From Hebrews 12:18 – 29, it would seem that there should be an awe about the Christian gathering. But that awe should be of God and of his assembly, not of the place or its outward trappings If we look to the building to create this sense of awe for us, we are in danger once again of by-passing what Jesus has done for us in redeeming us, and returning to the Old Testament.” From a theological standpoint, this statement may have merit; it ignores, however, the fact that there is such a thing as “a psychology of buildings.”⁵⁶

In concluding his paper, the author states that in his church’s being forced to relocate “our church activities,” this has “caused us to learn much about the nature of the church. We are learning lessons about ourselves and our meetings that are very precious and that we could probably not have learned in any other way. We have learned that we need good theology in order to produce a good building.”

⁵⁶ There is a vast literature on this subject, including the one book in my library that deals with it: Glenn Robert Lym, [*A Psychology of Building: How We Shape ad Experience our Structured Spaces*](#). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1980. [Because of space limitations in the apartment in which I live, I periodically discard books, this book being one of them.]

Let us now return to the question that prompted the above discussion: Would it be of value for Jesuans to meet with other Jesuans on a regular basis? And the *immediate* question is: Does the above discussion of the Round Church help us answer this question? I would answer this question in the affirmative, for I believe that the key point of importance that the author makes in his presentation is contained in this paragraph (my summary of the paragraph that precedes it):

Put another way, the purpose of “Christian meetings” is to “recharge the batteries” of those attending, so that when they leave the meetings, they will not merely (or only) be better prepared to cope in “the world,” but be so highly *motivated* that they will eagerly engage in loving behaviors toward everyone they encounter—and even beyond. This is not to say that no *learning* (of *what* to do, and *how* to do it) would occur during “Christian meetings.” But the *primary* goal of “Christian meetings” should be to give those attending the *enthusiasm* and *energy* they need to do God’s will in the world. Indeed, if those attending gain those qualities as a result of their attendance, the question of coping will never even arise!

I agree fully with this statement, but would add—for the sake of clarification—that the “do God’s work in the world” are my words, not the author’s, and that I might very well interpret that phrase somewhat differently than the author referred to above. As this is a convenient point to comment on that matter, I will do so now.

My starting point here is the obvious fact that the world that Jesus lived in was very different from the one that we do today. An implication of that fact—for me—is that, e.g., the Golden Rule does not have the same relevance today that it did 2000 years ago. Jesus lived in a land that was occupied—by the Romans—so that his teaching *necessarily reflected that fact*. I am fully aware of the fact that the statements of Jesus “recorded” in the Bible are usually taken, by “believers,” as “gospel” (!). But I would assert that the *fact* that we live under different circumstances than Jesus did, should cause us to think about the Golden Rule, e.g., *differently* than Jesus’s contemporaries in Galilee, etc.

Because Jesus conducted his “ministry” in an occupied land, his teachings needed to take that fact into consideration: The “good” that one could do was confined to treating others well, so that the Golden Rule *needed* to be interpreted in narrow terms, from the perspective of us moderns. Needed, that is, to be interpreted narrowly by Jesus, on the one hand, and by his listeners, on the other hand.

We moderns (living in the United States) do not live in an occupied country. It’s true, I’ll grant, that we seem to be moving in the direction of a fascist police state—and it’s certainly the case that the rich, and rich corporations, are gaining increasing control over our society (so that our country is becoming ever more inegalitarian). But ignoring these (highly unpleasant) facts, the fact of the matter is that we modern citizens of the United States do not need to give the Golden Rule a narrow meaning.

In doing so, let us first ask: What is *accomplished* in following the Golden Rule? And the answer is that in doing so, we contribute (we hope!) to the well-being of others. This means that the Golden Rule is not an *end*; rather, it is a *means* to an end—the well-being of others. Once we come to *that* realization, we moderns can ask ourselves: Is it *only* possible for us Jesuans to contribute to the well-being of others by engaging in direct acts of kindness—whether random or not? And my answer is that we moderns—unlike those around Jesus—have at least four avenues that we can pursue:

- Direct acts of kindness to others that we encounter in our lives—i.e., acts in accord with the Golden Rule, interpreted narrowly.
- Monetary gifts to organizations that engage in feeding the hungry, providing medical care to those needing it, providing transportation services to the blind and otherwise disabled, providing shelter to those who have been foreclosed on, etc.
- Engaging in political activity—either as an informed voter, or as one who runs for political office. (Where are the Jesuans in the latter category?! Many politicians claim to be followers of Jesus—including President Barrack Obama—but where are the examples of politicians who actually do?!)
- Engaging in efforts at societal system change. The basis of such efforts is the conclusion that virtually all of the problems that we face—as citizens of the United States, the world—are of a *systemic* nature. That is, they are “fruits” of the nature of our societal system, so that given that fact, problems will be solved only via societal system change. This possibility has been given little attention for decades, but was very much “in the air” during the 19th century—e.g., [Robert Owen](#) [1771 – 1858] and [Charles Fourier](#) [1772 - 1837].

All of the above, I would argue, can fall into the category “doing God’s will.” And I suggest that that fact should be kept in mind by those Jesuans who choose to meet together on a regular basis. Note, however, that I have still not answered the question of *why* it might be of value for Jesuans to meet on a regular basis.

The first point that I would make in favor of regular meetings is that we humans are social creatures who need contact with other human beings. It’s true that humans *vary* from individual to individual in many characteristics, including their need for contact with other human beings; but it’s also true that most of us need “people contact” for our psychological well-being. Indeed, if a human, upon birth, were given no care, it would die (except for the rare cases where abandoned children have been cared for by members of another species—in which case, however, they develop as “feral” beings).

Second, by meeting with others, one can share one’s ideas and knowledge with others, and receive the same in return.

And, finally, one can gain *motivation*—enthusiasm and energy—as a result of one’s interactions with fellow Jesuans. Not that one can—or should—confine one’s interactions to like-minded others, of course; indeed, one cannot be a “good Jesuan” if one does so! But meetings involve—or at least *can* involve—interactions of a different nature; and meetings with fellow Jesuans thereby have the potential to “build them up,” as noted earlier in discussing a paper by Brian Anderson.

This, however, brings us to the second question posed earlier in this paper: *Do* church “services” provide enough value to Jesuans to make their attendance of those meeting worthwhile?

Are Church “Services” Worth Attending?

I put “services” here in quotation marks because the major conclusion of the preceding section was that the purpose of “Christian meetings” is to *prepare* one for “service.” To refer to a church meeting as a “service” is to “put the cart before the horse.”

The question to be addressed in this section, then, is: Do church services prepare one for service? And in answering this question, it will be useful to begin by describing a typical church service—whoops! I meant to say meeting!

Within the church structure we find a large room, referred to as the “sanctuary,”⁵⁷ with “[pews](#),”⁵⁸ facing the front of the room. At the front is a raised platform, with a lectern (“pulpit” is the appropriate term) near the farthest-up pew, and one or more elaborate chairs (among other paraphernalia) behind the lectern. The minister occupies one of these chairs, and a layperson may occupy one of the other chairs. In addition, this area may have a special seating area for the choir—or the choir members may occupy the balcony. The pews will be occupied—to some degree—and those occupying them will be awake (for *part* of the meeting, at least!).

The “meeting” itself consists of the following (but not necessarily in the order listed):

- An organ prelude.
- Announcements.
- Congregational singing.
- Singing by the choir.
- Special music—e.g., a violin solo.

⁵⁷ Providing sanctuary *from what*?!

⁵⁸ Usually, they don’t stink, so why are they given that name?!

- Prayers delivered by the minister.
- Certain ritual activities (e.g., “communion”).
- Readings from “Holy Scripture;” e.g., the layperson may read from the Old Testament, followed by the minister reading from the New Testament. Regarding the latter, there may be a gospel reading, followed by an epistle reading. For the gospel reading, those in attendance may be asked to stand (“in reverence”).
- A sermon—delivered by the minister, of course.
- A collection—after all, the church needs money!
- A “coffee hour.”

From what I have described, a reader may very well respond: “I understand why you refuse to call this a ‘service.’ But why call it a ‘meeting’ either? It’s true that people have gathered in a particular place at a particular time, but wouldn’t ‘gathering’ be a better descriptor of what is going on than ‘meeting’? For no *interaction* is going on—except during the ‘coffee hour.’ Otherwise, most of those present are simply sitting in a pew (a) listening to something being said, (b) listening to music being sung and/or played, (c) participating in a responsive reading, and (d) singing when called upon to sing.”

Yes, indeed! Let’s look again at the purpose that Jesuan meetings should have, and ask ourselves whether it is met by the typical Christian meeting:

Put another way, the purpose of “Christian meetings” is to “recharge the batteries” of those attending, so that when they leave the meetings, they will not merely (or only) be better prepared to cope in “the world,” but be so highly *motivated* that they will eagerly engage in loving behaviors toward everyone they encounter—and even beyond. This is not to say that no *learning* (of *what* to do, and *how* to do it) would occur during “Christian meetings.” But the *primary* goal of “Christian meetings” should be to give those attending the *enthusiasm* and *energy* they need to do God’s will in the world. Indeed, if those attending gain those qualities as a result of their attendance, the question of coping will never even arise!

Whether those in attendance will *learn* anything that will help them in their Christian lives will depend largely on the quality of the minister—and whether or not they stay awake! I mention this latter point because from my description of a typical church meeting it should be evident that there is little to keep one awake! And even if one *does* manage to stay awake, what s/he learns may be (alleged) historical facts rather than information that will be helpful in living by the Golden Rule (interpreted expansively).

Beyond this, however, one is not likely to find one’s experience during this meeting *motivating*. And the reason for this should be obvious: One has not interacted with the others present in a

religious manner for the simple reason that the *structure* of the meeting has prevented one from doing so! Interacting with others during a church meeting would be considered “irreverent,” and rude besides—because it would interfere with the “message” being delivered by the minister. Some Jesuans might choose to attend church meetings recognizing that much of their time is ill-spent in doing so, but are drawn to the sermons of the minister—and her/his personality as well (for the minister may demonstrate that one can be a full-blown human while also being a Jesuan). But most Jesuans will find church meetings a waste of time (and money!), and will wish for an alternative. Herein, then, I offer one! It is obvious to me that it would be a waste of time to try to “fix” the existing churches, so that if, as a Jesuan, one wishes to meet with other Jesuans, and do so in a religiously meaningful way, one will need to attend a very different type of meeting—such as what I propose below.

An Alternate Type of Meeting for Jesuans⁵⁹

What I propose in Part III is a new institution, the New Word Fellowship (NeWF), with the inspiration for that institution coming from several sources, but I would like to offer a few introductory remarks to that Part here. First, several passages in the New Testament:

- Verses 14:16, 14:26, 15:26, and 16:7 in the gospel of *John*. In this section of the gospel Jesus is talking about his imminent departure, and is emphasizing the point that upon his leaving a Helper will be left to be with us. This “Helper” is variously translated as the Holy Spirit, a Comforter, and an Advocate.
- In Romans 7:18 – 20 Paul states (using my *Good News Bible*): “I know that good does not live in me—that is, in my human nature. For even though the desire to do good is in me, I am not able to do it. I don’t do the good I want to do; instead, I do the evil that I do not want to do.” (I need to add here, however, that recent research gives one good reason to question Paul’s assertion that his “human nature” prevented him from doing good. Paul’s “human nature” should be replaced with “socialized nature.” See, e.g., Frans de Waal’s [*Good Natured: The Origin of Right and Wrong in Humans and Other Animals*](#)⁶⁰ and Dacher Keltner’s [*Born to Be Good: The Science of a Meaningful Life*](#).⁶¹)
- In Galatians 5:19–23 Paul states (*Good News Bible*): “What human nature [read “socialized nature”] does is quite plain. It shows itself in immoral, filthy, and indecent actions; in worship of idols and witchcraft. People become enemies and they fight; they become jealous, angry, and ambitious. They separate into parties and groups; they are envious, get drunk, have orgies, and do other things like these. I warn you now as I have

⁵⁹ Much of the content of this section has been derived from pp. 43 – 60 of my “[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#),” previously cited.

⁶⁰ Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996.

⁶¹ New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2009.

before: those who do these things will not possess the [Kingdom of God](#). But the [Holy] Spirit produces love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, humility, and self-control. There is no law against such things as these.”

- Hebrews 10:24, 25: “Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the day drawing near.”

Second, the NeWF draws on certain practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France).⁶²

Third, the NeWF draws upon a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries.⁶³

Before discussing the NeWF [in Sections 6 and 7], I need to provide some background, and will begin by presenting a classification of meetings, commenting briefly on the categories in that classification, and then “place” the NeWF in the classification.

A. A Classification and Discussion of Meetings

I. Conventional Church “Services”

II. Discussion Groups

A. Fixed Leader

B. Leaderless

C. Rotating Leader

1. Unstructured

2. Structured

a. Fixed topics

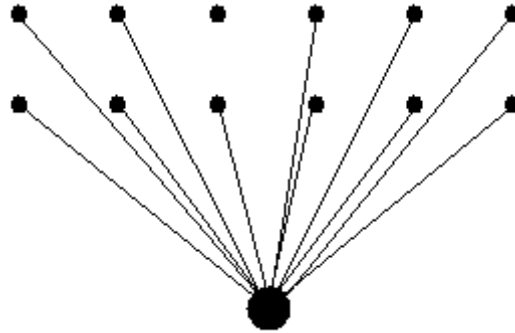
b. Saying what one feels “led” to say.

⁶²Elaine Pagels, [The Gnostic Gospels](#). New York: Random House, 1979, pp. 41-43.

⁶³[Medicine Story](#), “Circles of Freedom,” *Talking Stick: The Voice of Mettanokit* (Summer 1993), p. 5; and Lynn Murray Willeford, “Calling the Circle,” *New Age Journal* (May/June 1996), pp. 47, 50, 52, 54, 136-37. The periodical in which the Medicine Story piece was published appeared in my mailbox “out of the blue.” How thankful I am for having received this valuable article!

1. Conventional Church “Service”

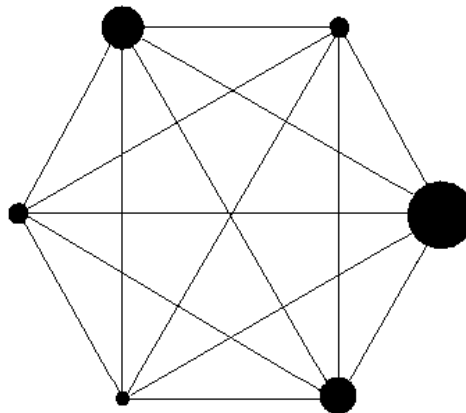
This was discussed above, and therefore needs no further discussion. It can be illustrated diagrammatically as follows:



The large circle here represents the minister, the small circles the individuals attending a given “service.” Note that the lines here emanate from the minister, indicating that the minister speaks to all of those present, and those present hear what the minister says—except for those who fall asleep (represented by the small circle with no line connecting to the minister)!

2. Fixed Leader Discussion Group

The figure which follows can be thought of as applicable to all of the following categories. In this case the circles represent participants in a discussion group (in the illustration just six), and the size of the circle is proportional to the amount of time the person in question tends to spend talking during a given session.



In the case of this fixed leader discussion group, there is a single person who has been designated the group’s leader (assume that the largest circle in the figure represents that person), and the leader (perhaps with input from those attending) selects what to discuss—passages in the Bible, a

new religious book, a topic of current interest, etc. Note that in this case no minister is present—for the simple reason that none is needed!⁶⁴

[The above discussion will give you some idea of what NeWFism is “about,” but the two sections (6 and 7) that constitute Part III will present detailed information about it.]

⁶⁴ It might be noted that Adam Smith [1723 – 1790] labeled “churchmen” as “unproductive”—along with “lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds; players, buffoons, musicians, opera-singers, opera-dancers, &c.” *The Wealth of Nations*, Vol. I, Book II, Chapter 2, pp. 295 – 296. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, Ltd, 1910 (available on the <http://books.google.com> web site).

Section 5. Future Orientation

[Paula Fredriksen](#) has stated the following about one of her books:⁶⁵

The Jesus encountered in the present reconstruction is a prophet who preached the coming apocalyptic Kingdom of God. His message coheres both with that of his predecessor and mentor, John the Baptizer, and with that of the movement that sprang up in his name. This Jesus thus is *not* primarily a social reformer with a revolutionary message; nor is he a religious innovator radically redefining the traditional ideas and practices of his native religion. His urgent message had not the present so much as the near future in view.

Of the many portraits that have been painted of Jesus, one has been that of an apocalyptic prophet. Relative to this, it has [been said](#) that:

Apocalypticism is the [religious](#) belief that there will be an [apocalypse](#), a term which originally referred to a revelation of God's will, but now usually refers to belief that the world will come to an [end time](#) very soon, even within one's own lifetime. This belief is usually accompanied by the idea that civilization will soon come to a tumultuous end due to some sort of catastrophic global event.

And:

The gospels portray Jesus as an apocalyptic prophet, described by himself and by others as the [Son of Man](#)—translated as the Son of Humanity—and hailing the restoration of Israel.^[3] Jesus himself, as the [Son of God](#), a description also used by himself and others for him, was to rule this kingdom as lord of the [Twelve Apostles](#), the judges of the [twelve tribes](#).^[4]

[Albert Schweitzer](#) emphasized that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, preparing his fellow Jews for the imminent end of the world. In fact, Schweitzer saw Jesus as a [failed, would-be Messiah](#) whose ethic was suitable only for the short interim before the apocalypse. Many historians concur that Jesus was an apocalyptic prophet, most notably [Paula Fredriksen](#), [Bart Ehrman](#), and [John P. Meier](#). E. P. Sanders portrays Jesus as expecting to assume the "viceroy" position in God's kingdom, above the Twelve Disciples, who would judge the twelve tribes, but below God.^[4] He concludes, however, that Jesus seems to have rejected the title Messiah, and he contends that the evidence is uncertain to whether Jesus meant himself when he referred to the

⁶⁵ [Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews](#): *A Jewish Life and the Emergence of Christianity*. New York: Vintage Books, 1999, p. 266. See also Bart D. Ehrman, [Jesus: Apocalyptic Prophet of the New Age](#). New York: Oxford University Press, Inc., 1999. One [anonymous reviewer](#) of Ehrman's book sums the book up this way: "The Jesus of history, contrary to modern 'common sense'...was not a proponent of 'family values.' He urged his followers to abandon their homes and forsake families for the sake of the Kingdom that was soon to arrive. He didn't encourage people to pursue fulfilling careers, make a good living, and work for a just society for the long haul; for him, there wasn't going to *be* a long haul."

Son of Man coming on the clouds as a divine judge (see also [Daniel's Vision of Chapter 7](#)), and further states that biblical references to the Son of Man as a suffering figure are not genuine.^[4]

The fact that a future orientation is attributed to Jesus in the (canonical) gospels is the last of the principles that I used in creating NeWFism, but as *I* look into the future I:

- Don't foresee the literal arrival of God on earth⁶⁶—an idea that somehow evidently got “converted” into the idea of a “[second coming](#)” for Jesus.
- Don't foresee the “end of the world,” but *do* foresee something close to that—a severe culling (perhaps to the point of extinction!) of our species, brought about by “global warming”—which is a problem of *our own making*, in that our transfer (via the burning of fossil fuels) of carbon from below Earth's surface to the lower atmosphere has caused an increased “[greenhouse effect](#),” which, in turn, has been causing global warming.

As I have developed, in some detail, ideas regarding global warming and how we humans should respond to it, I devote the remaining portion of this section to that body of ideas (part of a paper that I wrote on March 29, 2013):

Can We Beat Global Warming?

My short answer: “In one way, ‘No!’, in another way, ‘Perhaps’.” Sorry, but that's the best that I can do! Let me now indicate *why* I give that answer:

Despite the title of this subsection, I wish to address *three* matters here:

- Global warming as an *atmospheric phenomenon* (*set* of phenomena, actually).
- Its *implications* for humans.
- *Responding* to global warming.

Regarding the second point, I recognize that global warming has implications for many, if not most species, but I limit my attention here to its implications for *humans*. In doing so, it is not my intent to offend anyone.

⁶⁶ In large part because I don't perceive “God” as a person-like Being.

Global Warming Per Se

My starting assumption here is the fact that global warming *is* occurring,⁶⁷ so that there is no need for me to begin by providing *evidence* in support of that fact. In addition, I feel no need to *defend* the proposition that the *reason* that global warming is occurring is that our burning of fossil fuels, beginning around 1750 CE (i.e., the beginning of the Industrial Revolution) has involved the transfer of carbon (in the form of coal, petroleum, and natural gas especially) from below the earth's surface to the atmosphere, in the form of carbon dioxide (CO₂)⁶⁸, thereby increasing the atmosphere's "[greenhouse effect](#)." We *need* "[greenhouse gases](#)" in the atmosphere for our existence (and the existence of other forms of life); but an *increasing* concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere (i.e., an increasing greenhouse effect) represents problems for us and other forms of life, as we shall see.

Earth, as you may or may not know, is not heated *directly* by the sun but, rather, *indirectly*. The energy coming to earth *from* the sun is in the form of *short-wave* energy, for which the atmosphere is transparent. When the sun's rays strike the earth, and those rays are absorbed rather than reflected, earth warms, and then *re-radiates long-wave* heat energy into the atmosphere. The *presence* of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere enables some of that heat energy to be "trapped," which thereby enables the heating of earth—and maintenance of the earth's "[energy budget](#)."⁶⁹ But if the concentration of greenhouse gases in the lower atmosphere begins to *exceed* the "normal" level of concentration, a heating trend in the atmosphere begins to occur.

Two features of this heating trend are of especial concern to climate scientists because of their relevance for humans—which features *should*, therefore, be of concern to *everyone*.

First, there is the matter of what is called "climate change commitment," regarding which the following has [been stated](#):

Recent [models](#) forecast that even in the unlikely event of greenhouse gases stabilising at present levels, the earth would warm by an additional 0.5°C by 2100, a similar rise in

⁶⁷ The "deniers" have been answered well by James Hoggan, with Richard Littlemore, in [Climate Cover-Up: The Crusade to Deny Global Warming](#), 2009. Also see Joe Romm's "[99 One-Liners](#) Rebutting Denier Talking Points—With Links To The Full Climate Science."

⁶⁸ A more recent concern is the release of methane gas as the thawing of permafrost occurs in the arctic. See, e.g., [this](#). Methane is far more potent than carbon dioxide as a greenhouse gas.

⁶⁹ That is, the amount of heat energy *escaping* from earth into outer space is kept about equal to the amount of heat energy *re-radiating from* earth—so that the global mean temperature remains relatively constant over time.

temperature to that seen during the 20th century. As ocean waters expand in response to this warming, global [sea levels](#) would mount by about 10 centimetres during that time. These models do not take into account [ice cap](#) and [glacier](#) melting; including those [climate feedback](#) effects would give a 1°C - 1.5°C estimated temperature increase.⁷⁰

That is, if *everyone* on earth were to stop emitting greenhouse gases into the atmosphere *tomorrow*, the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would begin to decrease—but would not return to a “normal” level for a very long period of time. What this means is that the “excess” greenhouse gases in the atmosphere would *continue* to have an effect, so that by 2100 CE the increase in the global mean temperature *solely* attributable to this factor is likely to be between 1° C and 1.5° C. Such an increase may *seem* small, but as we shall see shortly, such an increase *would* actually be highly significant.

From a *human* standpoint, the reason this factor of “inertia” is so important is that if we wait until the effects of global warming are *clearly evident* (they are certainly *beginning* to be!), it will then be too late to halt further warming.

Why is such halting so important? This brings us to the *second* feature of global warming that makes it such an insidious problem, that of a “[tipping point](#).” This refers to that point in time when the increased heating of the atmosphere causes the *negative* feedback mechanisms associated with Earth System—mechanisms that have so far been “trying” to maintain relative stability by “fighting” climate change—“give up,” and then give way to *positive* feedback mechanisms, which will “work” to *accelerate* change. Last year, Bill McKibben, in his “[Global Warming’s Terrifying New Math](#),” noted that so far (i.e., since about the time that the Industrial Revolution got underway) the global mean temperature has increased by “only” about 0.8° C.

He went on to point out, though, that the consensus with climate scientists is that an increase of about 2° C. is the critical amount—for reaching, and then crossing, the tipping point. However, McKibben noted: “NASA scientist [James Hansen](#), the planet’s most prominent climatologist, is even blunter: ‘The target that has been talked about in international negotiations for two degrees of warming is actually a prescription for long-term disaster.’” And McKibben then observed that hurricane specialist Kerry Emanuel of MIT would go even farther than most of his colleagues, placing the relevant amount at just 1° C.

If we *conservatively* assume a “built-in” increase of 1° C. (derived from the above quotation), it is clear that *Emanuel’s* critical point would *inevitably* be met and crossed; and the *consensus* point of 2° C. would *almost* be crossed (i.e., $0.8^{\circ} + 1^{\circ} = 1.8^{\circ}$) at some point in the future; and if we use the 1.5° C. “built-in-increase” value instead, even the consensus value of 2.0° C. will

⁷⁰ V. Ramanathan and Y. Feng in effect argue that the “commitment” value is an additional 1.6° C. in this 2008 [statement](#): “The observed increase in the concentration of greenhouse gases (GHGs) since the preindustrial era has most likely committed the world to a warming of 2.4°C (1.4°C to 4.3°C) above the preindustrial surface temperatures.” That is, $0.8^{\circ} \text{ C (the increase to date)} + 1.6^{\circ} \text{ C.} = 2.4^{\circ} \text{ C.}$

inevitably be met and crossed, the only question being *when*. This matter of “when” is extremely important, because after the tipping point is crossed, climate change can be expected to *accelerate*, and a severe culling of the world’s population is likely to occur—*regardless* of what we humans then do to address the matter.

When will the “tipping point” be reached, and crossed? Fred Pearce⁷¹ says this:

Nobody is quite sure when the tipping point might occur. “It is possible,” says [Peter] Cox⁷², “that the 2003 surge of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere is the first evidence.” But while some parts of the biosphere may now be irrevocably stuck as carbon sources, the entire system is likely to take a few decades to switch. But of course, much will probably depend on how fast we allow temperatures to rise.

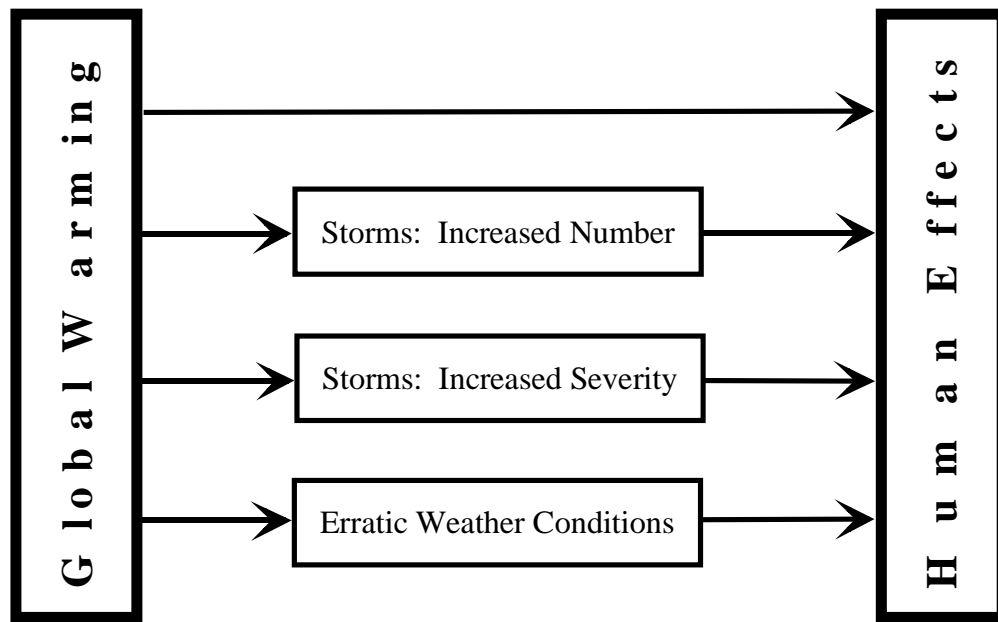
Cox suggests that 2040 is probably when the biosphere will start taking revenge on us for relying on its accommodating nature.

That is, Peter Cox believed—as of 2008 CE—that a tipping point would be reached, and crossed, by 2040 CE. I suspect, however, that given the current concern regarding [methane gas](#) being emitted in arctic regions, he might *now* move that date somewhat closer. Which is by no means “good news,” of course!

Before proceeding further here, it is advisable to recognize that global warming is (a) a cause of *other* atmospheric phenomena, and that (b) it is not just global warming *per se* that has relevance for humans, but also (c) the atmospheric phenomena *caused* by global warming—a fact depicted by the figure below:

⁷¹ Fred Pearce, [With Speed and Violence: Why Scientists Fear Tipping Points in Climate Change](#), 2008, pp. 75 – 76.

⁷² Cox works at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, at Winfrith, in [Dorset](#)—a [county](#) in [South West England](#) on the [English Channel](#) coast.



What this figure indicates is that global warming has both *direct* and *indirect* effects on humans, the latter by way of causing certain atmospheric phenomena that *themselves* then affect humans:

- An increase in the *number* of storms,
- An increase in the *severity* of storms, and
- *Erratic* weather—warm when it “shouldn’t be, rainy when it “shouldn’t be, etc.

All of these aspects of “global warming” will be—already *are*, in fact!—presenting problems for us humans, and it is important to keep the fact of global warming’s various “dimensions” in mind (which is why I referred earlier to global warming as a “*set* of phenomena”).

Global Warming’s Implication for Us Humans

As to *how* global warming will affect us over time, one thing that has bothered me about the global warming literature is the absence in it of any sort of *scenario* of likely change. Thus, recently, while [reviewing](#) James Lovelock’s [The Vanishing Face of Gaia: A Final Warning](#) (2009), I presented the following brief scenario:

As global warming proceeds, it will, of course, affect some individuals more than others in the early years; but as I wish to use a *societal*, rather than an *individual*, perspective here, the first point that I would make is that global warming would cause disruptions in the economy. Some producers of necessities (food, most notably) would find that their

products were damaged (directly or indirectly) by global warming, thereby lessening the quantity of their items on the market—and increasing the prices for those items. Initially, the amount of damage, and resulting price increases, might be minimal enough that people could substitute one item for another, and still survive comfortably. However, as the amount of damage—both in terms of number of items affected, and damage to a given item—increases, food shortages will develop, and people will begin to acquire necessities by theft—using violence if necessary—rather than purchase. Indeed, a point will be reached where economies begin to collapse—meaning that the production of many items will cease, and the transportation of items from one place to another will also cease. When *this* occurs, people will begin “dying like flies” as a result of starvation, disease, and violence—to say nothing of premature deaths resulting from excessive heat, storms, floods, fires, etc.

As a crisis develops, governments can be expected to step in to respond. But as governments begin to lose their personnel because of global warming and otherwise lose their ability to act, they will also break down—leaving behind a situation of utter chaos. People will start wandering around, abandoning the cities, in search of food, so that even those who have anticipated the consequences of global warming, have moved to a “safe” location, and have attempted to engage in adaptive behaviors may find desperate people at their doors—and faced with the question: “Should I try to help these people, or should I shoot them so that at least I and the members of my family have a chance to survive.” A difficult choice—one that I hope that I am never faced with (unlikely because of my age, but I have four grandchildren [with another one now on the way], and hope that they are not faced with such a dilemma).

Here’s why I believe that a scenario such as the one above is of value:

- It gives global warming a *human dimension*. So much of the literature on the subject is just concerned with global warming as such, without reference to its various *implications*. Of course, if one’s training is in Physics and Chemistry, that training lacks relevance for commenting on the matter of implications.
- It makes global warming seem more *real*. Put another way, it gives the subject some “life.”
- It helps make clear the point that global warming is, in fact, an *extremely serious* problem—a problem that involves *all* of us *intimately*.
- Most importantly, the potential value of such a scenario is that it may help *motivate* people to respond to this threat. That is my *hope*, at any rate.

If my scenario above “downplays” the severity of the threat posed by global warming, others have been more explicit about this matter. For example, here is statement regarding the matter by one scientist, Malcolm P. R. Light, near the end of a [highly-technical paper](#):

- Developed (and some developing) countries must cut back their carbon dioxide emissions by a very large percentage (50% to 90%) by 2020 to immediately precipitate a cooling of the Earth and its crust. If this is not done the earthquake frequency and methane emissions in the Arctic will continue to grow exponentially leading to our inexorable demise between 2031 to 2051.

(Light is associated with [CPOM](#), the Centre for Polar Observation & Modelling.)

Paleobiologist Steven M. Stanley ([Children of the Ice Age: How a Global Catastrophe Allowed Humans to Evolve](#), 1998, p. 16) has noted (in effect) the irony involved here:

Interlopers we are indeed. Ironically, we are now engendering environmental changes that threaten to alter the very climatic regime whose origin brought our genus into existence. The fortuitous appearance of *Homo* deserves close scrutiny, as does the trouble-laden proclivity of modern humans to modify our environment—and ourselves.

That is, environmental change *enabled*—indeed, virtually *forced*—us humans to evolve, and *now* environmental change—brought about by *our actions*!—may result in our demise as a species! Light’s suggestion that we might go the way of the dinosaurs is a hard idea to “wrap our minds around”—because the problem that we are faced with today is unprecedented in our history. Light’s words *should*, however, be taken seriously—especially given that the likelihood that our “leaders” will act decisively to confront this problem is close to 0.00!

It’s true that Light’s conclusions *have* been [questioned](#), but *that* fact should not cause us to “brush off” his warning. After all, scientists are often critical of one another’s work—not out of spite, of course (usually!), but out of respect for the Truth.

I should add here that Britain’s Kevin Anderson is another scientist who has been vocal in [emphasizing the threat](#) posed by global warming:

In a devastating speech at the University of Bristol Tuesday November 6th, 2012, [Professor Kevin Anderson](#) accused too many climate scientists of keeping quiet about the unrealistic assessments put out by governments, and our awful odds of reaching global warming far above the proposed 2 degree safe point.

In fact, says Anderson, we are almost guaranteed to reach 4 degrees of warming, as early as 2050, and may soar far beyond that - beyond the point which agriculture, the ecosystem, and industrial civilization can survive.

To view a video of Prof. Anderson’s [Cabot Institute](#) Annual Lecture (2012)—“Real Clothes for the Emperor: Facing the Challenge of Climate Change”—go to [this site](#). I have already quoted a statement by James Hansen, but also see his [web site](#), and that of [Clive Hamilton](#).

Responding to the Threat

This brings us, then, to the question of how we might best *respond* to the threat that global warming poses—not only to us humans, but many other species, of course. Put another way: *What can we humans do to “falsify”—to some degree at least—the “picture” that I have painted in the scenario that I presented above?*

Because of this topic’s importance, I have thought it necessary to discuss the matter in three subsections:

- The presentation of a chart that identifies the different *actors* in this drama, and the sorts of *activities* that might be associated with each actor.
- Some *explanatory* comments regarding each actor-activity combination to provide some clarification of the activity identified. Each set of comments will be identified with an Arabic number (e.g., “1”) representing the *actor* in question, and a lower-case letter (e.g., “a”) representing a potential *activity* associated with that actor.
- Critical comments directed at each of the actor-activity combinations.

The paper will conclude with a “Conclusions” section (which would seem to be appropriately named!).

The Chart

| Actors | Activities |
|---|--|
| 1. Business Firms | a. Cease producing polluting energy. b. Research the development of “safe” energy sources. |
| 2. Governments (federal in particular) | a. Tax fossil fuel firms heavily. b. Fund “safe” energy research. c. Institute a program of geo-engineering. d. Initiate an eco-community program. e. Population reduction measures. |
| 3. Private Organizations (e.g., foundations, religious groups, fraternal organizations, etc.) | a. Programs to support <i>in situ</i> adjustments. b. Programs to create eco-communities. |
| 4. Individuals | a. Try to influence the decisions of political/business leaders. b. Engage in <i>in situ</i> adjustment activities. |

| | |
|--|--|
| | c. Move to an existing eco-community. d. Create, with a few others, an eco-community, and then move to it. e. Move to a rural location and begin to homestead. f. Accomplish suicide. |
|--|--|

Explanatory Comments

Warning

In a very real sense, much of the discussion in this section is pointless, because we have already established that it's virtually certain that a critical tipping point will be crossed "soon," with a severe culling of the world's population then occurring—for it will then not be possible to halt further warming.

[Joe Romm](#) recently made this [sobering statement](#):

As a NOAA-led paper explained 4 years ago, climate change is "[largely irreversible for 1000 years](#)."

He then added:

This notion that we can reverse climate change by cutting emissions is one of the most commonly held myths—and one of the most dangerous, as explained in this 2007 MIT study, "[Understanding Public Complacency About Climate Change: Adults' mental models of climate change violate conservation of matter](#)."

Given (a) the high probability that a tipping point will be reached before 2040 CE, (b) that "climate change" will then accelerate, (c) a consequence being that most of the world's population will be wiped out, the only discussion below with any real relevance is that under points 2.d, 3.b., 4.c., 4.d., and 4.e. below. Nevertheless, I feel an obligation to comment on all of the points identified in the chart above.

Business Firms

1.a. Cease Producing Polluting Energy

There are firms that *produce* energy (e.g., gasoline), on the one hand, but *all* firms are *users* of energy. The former sort of firms could cease producing fuels with a fossil fuel basis, and other firms could strive to *minimize* their use of such fuels.

1.b. Research the Development of “Safe” Energy Sources

Firms have been developing solar panels (and ideas for the use of “passive solar”), windmills for generating electricity, and fuels from biomass, and this research and development could continue.

Saving energy is also of significance, and [John](#) and Nancy Jack Todd have been engaged in important *design* research that has great relevance for this purpose—[these three books](#) being examples. Today, their efforts have particular relevance for those engaging in efforts to *adapt* to the ravages that global warming will soon be inflicting on us.

Governments

2.a. Tax Fossil Fuel Firms Heavily

Governments could levy a substantial tax on, e.g., gasoline—in an effort to encourage fossil fuel firms to pursue other business interests, and simultaneously encourage those and other firms to step up efforts to create “safe” energy sources.

2.b. Fund “Safe” Energy Research

If governments *want* something done, and know that only government funding will ensure that it *gets* done, it will fund efforts to get that something done; the federal government *is* currently providing incentives for the development of “safe” energy, and could continue, and even intensify, those efforts.

2.c. Institute a Program of Geo-Engineering

“Geo-engineering” is a term that encompasses a [number of different activities](#), and some—or all—of such activities could be encouraged, via various incentives, by governments—the federal government in particular.

2.d. Initiate an Eco-Community Program

John Curl, in his [For All the People: Uncovering the Hidden History of Cooperation, Cooperative Movements, and Communalism in America](#)⁷³ (2009) notes (pp. 315 – 322) that during the Great Depression the Roosevelt administration inaugurated a communities program, stimulated largely by [Ralph Borsodi](#)’s [Flight From the City](#) (1933). A similar program—but having global warming as its focus, rather than unemployment—could be instituted today.

⁷³ The link here is to the *book itself*, not merely a description of it!

2.e. Population Reduction Measures

Regard the following as a “venting” sidebar that expresses my moral outrage regarding the behavior of our country:

Killing has been one of this country’s major pastimes from the very beginning—involving the indigenous peoples of this country, the killing of civilians in Vietnam, our support of “death squads” in Latin America, the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians in Iraq, and our current killing of women and children through drone strikes. Given that our Nobel Peace Prize-winning president has now even arrogated to himself the right to kill *our own* citizens upon his order, this raises the question: Why not have our Air Force bomb New York City, Chicago, Los Angeles, Atlanta, etc., in an effort to reduce pollution by eliminating those who produce it?! And if *that’s* not acceptable, why not induce *some other* country to do this to us? After all, is there not a precedent for this in the Roosevelt administration’s efforts to induce the Japanese to attack Pearl Harbor?—a plan that worked, and enabled us to enter World War II. (See Robert B. Stinnett’s [Day of Deceit](#), 2001.)

There, now I feel a little better!

Private Organizations

3.a. Programs to Support *in situ* Adjustments

[Will Allen](#) here in Milwaukee has been engaged in some important research and activity relative to increasing self-sufficiency, and such work could be expanded considerably were private organizations to provide the necessary financial and other needed assistance.

3.b. Programs to Create Eco-Communities

In the 1930s and 1940s Arthur E. Morgan—a Unitarian who turned Quaker—became a supporter of small communities, and wrote [The Small Community](#) (1942). The importance of “scale” was taken up later by Kirkpatrick Sale in his [Human Scale](#) (1980). These gentlemen advocated the small community for reasons *other* than addressing the problem of global warming, but their reasons for supporting small community are still valid—and will achieve fruition only if some individuals or private organizations step forward to promote the idea. What needs to be added to the idea *today*, however, the fact of global warming.

Individuals

Note

Except for point 4.a. below, the other options all assume that global warming cannot be halted, so that the only meaningful response is trying to adapt to the changes that will be inevitably occurring.

4.a. Try to Influence the Decisions of Political/Business Leaders

One option that individuals have is to voice their concerns to our political and business leaders. This can be done by writing letters, sending emails, going to the offices of political leaders, participating in protest marches, etc. Bill McKibben's 350.org is an example of one citizen's efforts to raise the public's awareness regarding global warming.

4.b. Engage in *in situ* Adjustment Activities

If one is aware of what Will Allen is doing here in Milwaukee and what others are doing and writing about elsewhere that pertain to “in place” adaptive measures, one could experiment with some of these ideas—and develop one's own. If one does the latter, and believes that one has developed some good ideas, one can attempt to publicize those ideas.

4.c. Move to an Existing Eco-Community

At present, there are numerous “[intentional communities](#)” in this country, including right here in [Wisconsin](#). Some of these are eco-communities, some are not—so that if one is considering this option, one will need to “check out” any communities that one is considering. This would include determining whether or not a given community is accepting new members.

4.d. Create, With a Few Others, an Eco-Community, and Then Move to It.

If one finds the eco-community option attractive, but is not satisfied with existing ones of which one is aware (for social, distance, etc., reasons), one can consider getting together with some others with the same interest in one's locality, purchase the necessary land, make plans for the community, and then build it (or *have* it build by professionals).

4.e. Move to a Rural Location and Begin to Homestead

If one believes that “staying put” is a recipe for disaster, but is somewhat of “loner,” rather than considering the eco-communitarian option one might consider [homesteading](#).

4.f. Accomplish Suicide

This is not to *recommend* suicide as a “way out,” but simply to acknowledge that just as many veterans today are “suiciding,” so is highly probable that as global warming “progresses,” this option will be taken by more and more people.

Critical Comments

Business Firms

1.a. Cease Producing Polluting Energy

Those firms which currently *produce* energy derived from fossil fuels may *claim* that they are interested in developing “safe” alternatives, but why should we *believe* them?! Does not, e.g., the [Keystone pipeline](#) project prove otherwise? The executives of these firms seem to be obsessed with next quarter’s “bottom line,” and for some unfathomable reasons don’t seem to recognize that global warming is a *global* problem that will affect *them* along with everyone else! Firms *using* energy derived from fossil fuels are primarily interested in the *costs* that they incur in using energy, and unless their managements have a concern for global warming, they are unlikely to switch to “safe” energy sources unless such sources are cost-effective.

1.b. Research the Development of “Safe” Energy Sources

I should first note here that regarding fuels derived from biomass, at any rate, questions regarding degree of “safety” have arisen recently.⁷⁴ The important question that arises here, however is: *Can*—and *will*—developments in this area *occur* quickly enough, and be *implemented* quickly enough, to prevent a tipping point be reached and crossed? I, for one, have serious doubts about this.

Governments

2.a. Tax Fossil Fuel Firms Heavily

Given the “clout” that the fossil fuels exert in this society, in the first place this is not likely to occur. But if it were to occur, it’s burden would fall especially on lower-income people—for our society has developed around the principle of cheap energy, so that *all* of us are dependent on fossil fuels today (gasoline and natural gas in particular), and any increases in their cost would add to the misery of those with lower incomes. In addition, even were this measure to be

⁷⁴ See, e.g., http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-gibbs/post_4087_b_2073600.html, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jeff-gibbs/the-biomassacre-marches-o_b_2103396.html, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fOSRHksoZJ8>, and www.greenillusions.org.

implemented, it would offer no guarantee of preventing a tipping point from being reached and crossed—eventuating in massive culling of populations here and elsewhere.

2.b. Fund “Safe” Energy Research

Ostensibly this is a good idea—but it is probably “too little, too late.” That is, it would appear that we are close to a tipping point (if we have not already reached it!), so that such an effort is unlikely to be effective.

2.c. Institute a Program of Geo-Engineering

Geo-engineering measures would need to be sponsored by the national government, and can have the advantage—“theoretically”—of having quick results. Malcolm P. R. Light (*op. cit.*) has, however, said the following about geo-engineering measures:

- Geoengineering must be used immediately as a cooling method in the Arctic to counteract the effects of the methane buildup in the short term. However these methods will lead to further pollution of the atmosphere in the long term and will not solve the earthquake induced Arctic methane buildup which is going to lead to our annihilation.

In effect, he is saying here that “you’re damned if you don’t”—but also “damned if you do”!

Steve Horn (a blogger who lives in Madison, Wisconsin, and writes for [DeSmogBlog.com](http://DesmogBlog.com)) recently sent this to me:

As I always tell people concerned about environmental issues whose response is a "techno-fix,"
"be careful for you wish for, it might come true."

I recommend reading the links below. Geo-engineering is *not* any sort of solution anyone who cares about building a just society should be advocating for. Neither are "techno-fixes" at-large.

<http://www.etcgroup.org/content/geopiracy-case-against-geoengineering>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/oct/15/pacific-iron-fertilisation-geoengineering>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/jul/17/us-geoengineers-spray-sun-balloon>

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/environment/2012/oct/17/canada-geoengineering-pacific>

<http://www.nytimes.com/2012/10/28/opinion/sunday/geoengineering-testing-the-waters.html?pagewanted=all&r=0>

It would appear, then, that there are serious risks in taking this approach—that because of the unintended—and unforeseen—consequences of such measures, they might actually be worse than the “disease” itself, i.e., global warming!

2.d. Initiate an Eco-Community Program

This would be a great idea, and (as I indicated earlier) would have a precedent in our history; however, the probability of such a program being initiated is 0.00!

2.e. Population Reduction Measures

I would *hope* that such measures would not be implemented, but given the dastardly, nefarious activities that our government has been involved in in the past (see, e.g., [William Blum’s site](#), and the [McCollum memo](#)), it is not unthinkable that it would engage in such measures in the near future.

Private Organizations

3.a. Programs to Support *in situ* Adjustments

Another rather good idea—but I see no evidence that private organizations are doing much, if anything, along this line.

3.b. Programs to Create Eco-Communities

The same for eco-communities.

Individuals

4.a. Try to Influence the Decisions of Political/Business Leaders

Such efforts *are* being engaged in, but my personal view is that they are an utter waste of time—because the likelihood of our leaders heeding warnings regarding global warming approach 0.00.

4.b. Engage in *in situ* Adjustment Activities

Given that such activities, because they would not involve physically moving to a different location, are “doable,” and I would like to see more people investigate what, e.g., Will Allen is doing right here in Milwaukee, investigate the numerous resources available of relevance for this option, and start implementing the ideas they learn about. At the same time, I would hope that those taking this option would recognize that reaching, and crossing, a tipping point is inevitable within a few decades, and that they take that fact into consideration as they make their plans.

4.c. Move to an Existing Eco-Community

Given that there *are* numerous intentional communities “out there” (as the links I provided earlier indicate), some of them being also eco-communities, opportunities exist for taking this option. However, because moving to a different location—and living with people who one doesn’t know, and in close proximity at that—is a decision that would be difficult for most people to take (it would take them out of their “comfort zone”), few are likely to take advantage of it.

4.d. Create, With a Few Others, an Eco-Community, and Then Move to It

A great idea, but (a) few have the financial resources to do it; (b) if one would like to take this option, one may not be able to find others to join one in the venture; (c) moving from one’s existing location is always a difficult decision to make; and (d) we moderns lack the diversity of skills that would enable many of us to take this option. I should add, though, that what I am suggesting here is the creation of, e.g., modern “[Brook Farms](#)”! (The United States has an interesting—and important—communal past; the literature on this subject is extensive, including the excellent [America’s Communal Utopias](#), 1997, edited by Donald E. Pitzer. By the way, [Wisconsin](#) also has had its “utopians.”)

4.e. Move to a Rural Location and Begin to Homestead

For some, this is an attractive option, and there is an abundance of resources—such as [this](#) and [this](#)—to provide one with the necessary skills to make taking this option a success.

D.5. Accomplish Suicide

I certainly would not advocate one taking this option, but believe that as living situations begin to deteriorate, many will.

Conclusions

To answer the question posed by my subtitle—“Can We Beat Global Warming”? “Almost certainly **No!**” Which means that insofar as we have *any* options, engaging in efforts to *adapt* to the changes that will inevitably be occurring would seem to be our only viable course of action. And to answer the question asked on p. 7 above: *What can we humans do to “falsify”—to some degree at least—the “picture” that I have painted in the scenario that I presented above?* Nothing! All we can do is try to *adapt*.

It seems highly likely that we will be crossing a critical tipping point within a few decades (if we haven’t already done so!), and *that* strong probability means that *the only* choice we have now is

that of trying to adapt to the changes that will be occurring. This can take the form of homesteading or (preferably) living in eco-communities. Even the adaptation option, however, has the problem that it offers *no guarantees*—for global warming is likely to severely decimate the world's population. We must not, however, let this possibility deter us from action.

The choices before us are twofold:

We can either wait for others to act on our behalf (so far as global warming is concerned) or, rather, we can *ourselves* take action.

It is my conviction that the first course would be a foolish one to take—because our “leaders” are so in name only: On the one hand, they seem principally to be at the “beck and call” of fossil fuel interests, and for that reason are not likely to act—until it's too late. In addition, one wonders if many of them are even *aware* of the severity of the problem that global warming poses.

Insofar as there *is* a best answer—and there *is* none, in my opinion! (**because it's likely that global warming will wipe out most of the world's population within a matter of decades**)—it is moving in an eco-communitarian direction⁷⁵ (as discussed above). Indeed, in 1984 (!) I published a 5-“wave” strategy/scenario of societal system change in an eco-communitarian direction,⁷⁶ and have often wondered what our society would be like today had that strategy/scenario been implemented, beginning in 1984.

That solution has two principal problems, however:

- It will get underway *only* if some private organizations and/or wealthy individuals provide the necessary funding.
- Even if it is implemented, and “takes off” (which itself is not likely, given people's resistance to moving physically), it is likely to result in the “salvation” of just a fraction of the world's population.

These are both serious problems. My hope, however, is that they will not discourage potential leaders so much that they don't even *try* to save as many people as possible.

It is often said that our species is the most intelligent of all species. Isn't it about time for us to demonstrate at least *some* modicum of intelligence?!

⁷⁵ Given that my Ph. D. is in Urban Economic Geography (University of Cincinnati, 1970), it is perhaps not surprising that the solution that I recommend is a *geographical* one!

⁷⁶ “[Ecotopia: A 'Gerendipitous' Scenario](#).”

Given that today (March 29, 2013) is Good Friday, the following verses from [Luke](#) 23:28 – 30, might be appropriate in closing:

“Daughters of Jerusalem, do not weep for me [Jesus]; weep for yourselves and for your children.

²⁹ For the time will come when you will say, ‘Blessed are the childless women, the wombs that never bore and the breasts that never nursed!’ ³⁰ Then

“they will say to the mountains, “Fall on us!”
and to the hills, “Cover us!””

Not a very pretty picture, true, but one likely with a great deal of realism.

A “Pre-Summary”

As I stated earlier, the new religion introduced in this eBook was inspired by the New Testament, and is based on four principles, all drawn from the New Testament: (a) Virtues, (b) an Altered State of Consciousness, (c) Participatory Meetings, and (d) a Future Orientation. I should add that although the new religion was inspired by the New Testament, it differs from virtually all existing Christian denominations in having a *this-worldly* orientation. In addition, let me at this point state that the name of the new religion—NeWFism, named for the religion’s central institution, the New Word Fellowship—is discussed in Sections 6 and 7 (which together constitute Part III, which follows).

The expectation here is that those attracted to NeWFism will have a commitment to the **virtues** discussed in Section 2, with the further expectation that participation in NeWF discussions will help solidify that commitment. That is, it is assumed that participation in NeWF discussions will help one develop attitudes and motivation that will result not only in an interest in the well-being of others, but in behaviors directed toward that end.

My reference here to NeWF *discussions* is important, because two key differences between NeWFism and the various denominations of Christianity are that with NeWFism (a) the focus is on **participatory meetings** involving structured interaction among those present, and (b) *that* fact implies that NeWFism would resemble, e.g., Quakerism and the Mennonite religion in not having a paid clergy.

NeWFism’s orientation to others’ well-being includes an orientation to the **future**, with the recognition that the global warming that is now occurring is (a) the most serious problem ever faced by our species, and (b) (as indicated earlier in this section) is likely to severely cull the world’s population within a few decades. NeWFism holds, however, that (c) a movement in an eco-communitarian direction holds hope for “saving” at least some portion of the world’s population.

I suggest, in Section 7, that one direct result of NeWF participation may be an **altered state of consciousness** for one or more members, which can result in the generation of useful ideas relative to addressing the global warming problem (among other possibilities), enthusiasm for implementing ideas, and a myriad of other possibilities.

Part III: The New Religion

Section 6. Introductory Comments

(What follows is basically an extract from a paper that I wrote several years ago.)

One could very well argue that most church services don't *involve* worship in a Biblical sense; and that church services typically don't even *prepare*—or prepare well—those attending them for worship *activities*.

The question that arises, then, is: Given a group of individuals who live in the same general area, who would like to give worship activities a more prominent role in their lives, who would like to meet with like-minded others and, finally, who would like those meetings to be *helpful* to them, from a worship perspective, how should they *design* their meetings? What principles should they follow as they proceed in their meeting design? I would suggest the following:

- The service⁷⁷ should provide each attendee the opportunity to express his/her ideas regarding specific activities perceived as worshipful—whether those activities are ones that the speaker is thinking about for himself/herself; or ones of a collective nature, wherein the speaker is inviting others in the group to join in, if so inclined. Observation of this principle has, as one virtue, the advantage of enabling members of a congregation to become acquainted one with another. Conventional religious services (including “contemporary” ones) tend not to enable this to occur.⁷⁸ In fact, not only does the typical service not contribute to feelings of community/solidarity within the group; it tends to contribute to the formation of cliques, and thereby animosity. (An ironic fact, I might add!) For if one's experience, in attending to church, consists only of listening to a minister speak and chatting with a few others during the coffee hour, one is deprived of an opportunity to become well-acquainted with any of one's fellow congregants.
- It should provide each attendee with the opportunity to *speak* on whatever s/he feels “called” upon to speak about—whether it is a personal matter, a congregational matter, a matter of foreign affairs, or whatever. Indeed, this includes a freedom even to speak on matters that are only tangentially—if at all—related to worship activities! Respect for the person is the guiding principle here, one that must be allowed to override all other principles.

⁷⁷I use the word “service” here rather than “meeting” because it is more familiar in this context. Given that “worship,” in a Biblical sense, *involves* service, strictly speaking it is not appropriate to call religious meetings “services”—even if their purpose is the preparation of attendees for service/worship.

⁷⁸ Having a “greeting” period does not—obviously—enable congregants to get to know one another.

- Corresponding with this opportunity to speak there should be an opportunity to *hear* what others have to say—whether or not that pertains directly, or even indirectly, to worship. An implication here is that one speaking must be allowed to speak without interruption—so that others are able to hear, and understand, what is being said.
- The opportunity to speak and listen should exist in a context in which interaction occurs. That is, people should have the opportunity to react to what others have said.
- This sort of interaction should occur in a situation that does not involve—or even allow, for that matter—exchanges that become heated. That is, interaction must proceed in an orderly manner that allows everyone to “have their say,” but in such a fashion that shouting matches do not occur—and walls are created: bridges are needed, not walls.
- Services should provide the opportunity for attendees to plan activities of a worship nature to be engaged in with members of the group.
- Services should provide an environment that strengthens the commitment of attendees to engage in worship activities.
- Related to this, services should energize those who attend them; they should, i.e., help attendees “recharge their batteries,” so that they will be better able to engage in worship activities throughout the coming week.
- Another way of stating this last point is that services should provide an environment that is inviting to the Holy Spirit—as a Being that can “possess” people, and thereby give them courage, energy, “aliveness,” etc.
- Given that the Holy Spirit can not only possess people, but reveal truths to them (as John’s gospel points out), services should be designed so that they conduce revelations to those in attendance.
- The environment of services should be such that they conduce the “knowledge” that God is a real, yet ultimately mysterious, Reality—about which little definite can be affirmed. One implication of this principle is that I see it as “telling” us that although music might very well be associated with services, this music should be wordless: there is wisdom in the historic use of organ music in church services. Charles Wesley is often promoted as one who had a gift for writing lyrics for hymns; perhaps it is time, however, that we begin to reconsider the wisdom of congregational singing—and instead allow only instrumental music during services. Why? Because any given set of lyrics expresses a particular theological viewpoint, and therefore by its very nature will be incapable of appealing to all of the members of a diverse group. The reason this latter point is important is that a subprinciple here is that meetings should *not* be restricted to just those with a certain given theological perspective—a principle that deviates rather sharply from conventional practice.
- Services (or perhaps I should say meetings) should provide an opportunity to socialize with others in the group on an informal basis.

Although in the process of enunciating these principles I have made a few comments on how inadequately conventional services “measure up,” I will eschew further commentary—instead encouraging the reader (if s/he agrees with these principles) to apply the principles to the church services with which they have had experience. Rather than critiquing the conventional service, my interest is in presenting ideas for a new service design, and I begin that process below by making a few background comments.

Whereas those who led Christianity’s initial development had (being under the sway of Greek philosophical concepts) an orientation to *truth* (with its associated intolerance, persecution, and violence), the nature of Jesus’s “ministry”—and specifically his use of the parable—indicates (it seems to me) that Jesus’s orientation, rather, was to *people*. How so? The first point to recognize here is that a parable, *by its very nature*, has no single, objective meaning.⁷⁹ If it did, there would be no point in conveying one’s message to others in such an indirect way.⁸⁰ This fact that parables, *by their very nature*, lack a single meaning—and therefore potentially have as many meanings as there are hearers of them⁸¹—was, I believe, recognized by Jesus (at an unconscious level, at any rate); and it was for this very reason that Jesus chose to teach using parables.

Jesus’s use of the parable in teaching indicates to me that he knew that people were not merely different physically and behaviorally, but different in how they *thought*. And because Jesus believed that humans were created by God, he therefore “knew” that human diversity—including intellectual/mental diversity—was *good*.⁸² Given his appreciation of human diversity, it is not at all surprising that Jesus used the parable in his “preaching.” For:

⁷⁹See Schuyler Brown’s perceptive comments in [Text and Psyche: Experiencing Scripture Today](#). New York: Continuum, 1998, p. 23.

⁸⁰I should note, however, that a number of years ago Hugh J. Schonfield argued that Jesus “spoke in parables so that the spies and informers who made it their business to be present wherever crowds gathered round a public speaker would be unable to detect anything subversive or inflammatory in what he said.” [The Passover Plot](#). New York: Bantam Books, 1969, p. 74. Originally published in 1966 by Bernard Geis Associates. A 40th anniversary edition of this book was published in 2005 by The Disinformation Company.

⁸¹*More*, in fact—for in my own experience I have found more than one way of interpreting the Good Samaritan parable, for example.

⁸²Paul’s reference, in I Corinthians 12:12 - 31, to followers of Jesus as being analogous to the different parts of a body (specifically, Jesus’s body) conveys the same idea. Two of my essays are concerned with this matter—[this](#) and [this](#).

- A parable encourages each hearer to derive an interpretation of the parable that has meaning for that person.
- Given, however, that a parable is a puzzle, and is likely to be so perceived, each hearer is likely to come to see his/her interpretation as tentative.
- Given this, the hearer of a parable is encouraged to realize that other hearers of a given parable not only likely interpret the parable differently, but also tentatively.
- Given *that*, a hearer of a parable may very well (depending on one's personality) feel motivated to ask other hearers how *they* interpret the parable—so that one may broaden and deepen *one's own* interpretation of the parable.
- In the process of this interaction with others, one may very well develop a feeling of tolerance—and even love—for others, and the group itself may develop a feeling of community.
- In the process of this interaction, spiritual growth on the part of each individual may also very well occur.
- Because a parable is easily committed to memory, it invites continual *re*-interpretation by each hearer, which means

In short, not only is use of the parable a teaching method that (unlike the dialogical method used by Socrates) tends to promote harmony and minimize violent behavior on the part of hearers; in so doing it tends to *cause* the very sort of behavior that it *advocates*.⁸³ So that Jesus's Good Samaritan parable, e.g., not only *illustrated* the "love of neighbor" law⁸⁴ that Jesus identified as central, but tended to *cause*, in a complex way, such behavior on the part of hearers. What genius!!

My own personal opinion is that where Christianity as a formal religion especially is deficient today is in its *services* (which is why I am writing this). Attempts have been made to correct that deficiency through the introduction of "contemporary" services. But the "contemporary worship" service movement can be criticized on a number of grounds,⁸⁵ and my own conviction is that that movement is not the answer to Christianity's problems—for it ignores the question of

⁸³Assuming, of course, that it *does*, in fact, teach love (if but indirectly).

⁸⁴This is not to say that that's *all* it did. One can argue that the Good Samaritan parable critiqued the religion of Jesus's society, was a critique of the book of Job, etc., etc.

⁸⁵See, e.g., A. Daniel Frankforter, [*Stones for Bread: A Critique of Contemporary Worship*](#). Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.

why we should meet in the first place. What I offer herein as an alternative to the “contemporary” service is a new institution, the *New Word Fellowship*. This is a recommendation that could be implemented either by existing churches (not too likely!), or by those who have exited their (Christian) churches—or those who are, and have been, unchurched. Although I do not herein explicitly propose the creation of a new religion, *in effect* I do, I suppose.

A given congregation that is formed might decide that its services should consist just of New Word Fellowship sessions; or might, rather, decide that Fellowship sessions would be featured in its services, but that its services should also contain elements in addition to Fellowship sessions. (Or it might begin by just having Fellowship sessions, and at a later date add other components to its services—and from time to time make changes in the character of its services.) At any rate, the subsections in Section 7 (following) focus on the New Word Fellowship *apart* from what role it might be given in a larger service

Section 7. The Religion: Nature and Expected Outcomes

The New Word Fellowship is novel as an institution in the sense that no other institution has its precise characteristics. It is an institution, however, that has borrowed heavily from practices developed by others over a long period of time: practices developed by an early (second century) Christian named Marcus (who lived in Lyon, France);⁸⁶ a tradition associated with certain Native American groups for centuries;⁸⁷ and meetings as conducted by Quakers (i.e., members of the Society of Friends).

Second, I must mention as an influence in creating my concept of a Fellowship my personal experience with the adult “Sunday school” class at the church that I have been attending since 1980. The group has consisted of individuals who have certain things in common (obviously), but each member of the group has his/her unique personality, each has had different life experiences, different educational levels are represented, etc. The group is not a random sample of American society, of course, but still is rather diverse—especially in that a variety of views are represented. Despite the latter fact, we all have felt free to express our views (so long as they are not too “heretical”!), because we know that the others in the group would respect them; for there has been a general consensus in the group that we are all “seekers,” and should all be allowed to go down the spiritual path that we feel called to travel on.

I have led this group at various times, and have, during those periods, attempted to promote the concept of shared leadership. So that when, several years ago, we were discussing Peter J. Gomes’s [*The Good Book: Reading the Bible with Mind and Heart*](#), I encouraged others in the group to choose a chapter, and then lead the discussion of that chapter. I did this not because I am lazy, but because I am convinced that no one has a monopoly on the truth—that everyone has something to offer, and that the group would benefit from rotating leadership. At any rate, participation in this group has been extremely important in my own spiritual development (and I think the other members of the group would say the same thing about themselves), and until recently I have attended these Sunday sessions “religiously.”

⁸⁶Elaine Pagels, [*The Gnostic Gospels*](#). New York: Random House, 1979, pp. 41-43.

⁸⁷Medicine Story, “Circles of Freedom,” *Talking Stick: The Voice of Mettanokit* (Summer 1993), p. 5; and Lynn Murray Willeford, “Calling the Circle,” *New Age Journal* (May/June 1996), pp. 47, 50, 52, 54, 136-37. The periodical in which the Medicine Story piece was published appeared in my mailbox “out of the blue.” How thankful I am for having received this valuable article!

One of the conclusions that I have been able to make as a result of this experience is that discussions (properly-conducted ones, I should add) can have intellectual value from two different perspectives (one the converse of the other). On the one hand, given that an abstract directive such as “love the neighbor” is literally meaningless as it stands, a discussion process can result in a “fleshing out” of the meaning of the principle so that it becomes more concrete, and therefore more meaningful. On the other hand, if a group, via a discussion process, decides on a certain course of action for the group, and would like a convincing rationale for that action, a discussion process can result in the creation (via revelation?) of a rationale that all find convincing—which fact then helps “energize” them as they plan, and proceed with, that action.

A final point that I would like to make here is that later I refer to the possibility of one experiencing an altered state of consciousness (i.e., a “natural high”) during a given Fellowship session, and that I have myself experienced such a phenomenon. Years ago I briefly had such experiences in conjunction with periods of intellectual creativity, but in 1976 was privileged to have a “high” that lasted continuously for over three months.⁸⁸ I don’t know why I was granted this valuable experience,⁸⁹ but *do* know, first, that such an experience is not that uncommon cross-culturally and historically.⁹⁰ And, second, believe that such an experience was common with the first “Jesuans.”⁹¹

Preliminaries

What is a New Word Fellowship? At its most basic level it is a discussion group (on the surface not terribly unlike the self-improvement Junto club established by Benjamin Franklin in 1727).

⁸⁸In addition, two books have given me a “natural high”: Thorstein Veblen, [*The Theory of Business Enterprise*](#). New York: New American Library, 1958. First published by Charles Scribner’s Sons in 1904. Louis Wallis, [*Sociological Study of the Bible*](#). Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1912. I read the first book in 1959, the second in 1984.

⁸⁹During that period my perceptions changed so that, e.g., I was perceiving differences in *kind*, but not *degree*. I recall, e.g., talking to a young woman during that period, encouraging her to run for a local political office. She responded that she felt that she was somewhat of a freak in being rather tall. Up to that point I had not noticed that “fact” about her. The “lesson” that I learned from that experience is that although it is “natural” to perceive differences in *kind*, such is not the case for differences in *degree*: such differences are ones that our minds *impose* on reality.

⁹⁰See, e.g., Felicitas D. Goodman, [*Ecstasy, Ritual, and Alternate Reality: Religion in a Pluralistic World*](#). Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988.

⁹¹For a brilliant discussion see Stevan L. Davies, *op cit*. See in particular Chapter 12 (“The Christian Cult,” pp. 170 - 87).

It differs from the ordinary discussion group, however, in that its participants assume (for one thing) that they will receive guidance from God during their deliberations—and may even experience Spirit-indwelling (which manifests itself as an altered state of consciousness).

Participants in a given Fellowship meet at a specified place on a regular (or not) basis. As they arrive at the meeting place, they are given a slip of paper by a functionary (the “Bishop”⁹²); they write their name on the slip, then give it to the Bishop, who then deposits it in a container. When the appointed time for the meeting arrives, the Bishop draws one slip (i.e., name) from the container—at random. (Use of a random procedure is based on the ancient Hebrew conviction that it is God who chooses when selections are made at random⁹³) The first name drawn by the Bishop designates the *Prophet* for that session—that is, the person who will initiate the discussion, and be authorized to keep the discussion “on track.”

(For the sake of clarification, I need to add at this point that the discussion that follows assumes one Fellowship session per congregation at any given time. Given that the ideal size of a Fellowship is about 12 individuals, if 50 members of a given congregation were present at the meeting place on a given day, the Bishop would create four Fellowship sessions for that day. For example, the first name chosen would be the Prophet for the first Fellowship, the thirteenth name the Prophet for the second group, the twenty-fifth name the Prophet for the third group, and the thirty-eighth name the Prophet for the fourth group formed that day. I might add that this procedure for forming subgroups within a given congregation at a given time means that the possible combinations of others in one’s group can be huge indeed. The relevant formula here is $n!/[r!(n-r)!]$, where n is the number of others in one’s whole congregation (present at a given time) and r is the number of others in one’s particular subgroup at a given time. Rather than using this formula, however, I would suggest that the Bishop refer to the chart in the Appendix to this section.)

Note that rather than the position of Prophet having a permanent occupant, it has a *new* occupant for each session. In other words, a rotational system is used, one based on the use of sortilege (i.e., a random procedure). This means not only that participants in a Fellowship do not know in advance who the Prophet will be for a given session. It also means (for the benefit of those who have some background in statistics) that each participant will, over time, occupy the position of Prophet about the same number of times. I realize that living, as we do, in a hierarchical society, most of us are used to there being “bosses” and “grunts”: despite the fact that we supposedly live in a society within which all are equal, we all know that that is far from true (even in a legal

⁹²The last will be first, and the first last!—as the Bible says (e.g., Mark 10:31).

⁹³Those who know their New Testament will also recall that after the death of Judas Ascariot, his successor was chosen by use of a random procedure (according to Acts 1:26, at any rate).

sense).⁹⁴ Consequently, most of us have become used to thinking of there being two classes of people, leaders and followers—and may therefore find it difficult to accept the notion that *anyone* can be a leader. The Fellowship, however, is based on the assumption that everyone is not only important and has something to offer, but that anyone *can* be a leader.

Once a Prophet has been chosen, and the participants are seated, the Prophet speaks—i.e., allows God to speak through him/her. The Prophet is expected to speak about that which s/he feels genuinely “called” to talk about—whatever that happens to be. So that although participants in a Fellowship all accept Jesus’s love of the neighbor command as their central “creed,” the Prophet should feel no obligation to speak words directly pertinent to that creed.⁹⁵

Whether or not the participants are seated around a table, they will be seated in a circle,⁹⁶ and a single candle is assumed to have been placed (by the Bishop) at the center of the circle—the flame symbolizing God: a real, if intangible, entity.⁹⁷ It is placed at the center of the group to signify that the participants all wish to place God at the center of their lives (with, of course, any agnostics and atheists present excused from so perceiving the candle).

After the Prophet has delivered a message (of perhaps 15-20 minutes), the others have an opportunity to react to the Prophet’s remarks. Discussion proceeds with the use of a “talking hoop”⁹⁸ passed around the group in a clockwise manner, beginning with the person to the

⁹⁴See, e.g., writings by [Michael Parenti](#) and [G. William Domhoff](#).

⁹⁵I am reminded here of Matthew Fox’s statement that psychologist Otto Rank, in *Art and Artist*, had declared that there is a profound purposelessness in all true art. ([Wrestling With The Prophets: Essays on Creation Spirituality and Everyday Life](#). HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1995.) The statement occurs on p. 211 in Chapter 11 (“Otto Rank on the Artistic Journey as a Spiritual Journey, the Spiritual Journey as an Artistic Journey”).

⁹⁶The “circle represents the unknowable, spirit, and the heavens” John Michell, [The Dimensions of Paradise: Sacred Geometry, Ancient Science, and the Heavenly Order on Earth](#). Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 2008, p. 72.

⁹⁷In addition, I would like to think that what Paul Shepard states regarding our ancient ancestors sitting around a fire apply to NeWF participants sitting in a circle, with a lit candle at the center. See pp. 155 - 56 in his previously-cited [Coming Home to the Pleistocene](#). For example, Shepard states (p. 155): “Fire was perhaps the first metaphor and therefore the master stimulus to deliberation, the symbol of life itself.” Shepard would assert that we humans—including us moderns—are drawn to sitting around a fire at night because selection processes, acting on our biology, have “designed” us for such an activity.

⁹⁸Another possibility would be to use a vine segment, the allusion here being to John 15:5. Also, a rope segment might be considered, given that a rope consists of a number of different strands—thus

Prophet's immediate left. That is, a hoop (symbolizing the unity of all things) is passed from participant to participant, the understanding being that only the person holding the hoop has the right to speak (the Prophet having, however, the right—indeed, the responsibility—to intervene any time s/he believes this to be necessary for the good of the group).

When a given participant has finished speaking, s/he passes the hoop to the first person to the left, who then speaks, passes the hoop to the next person, etc. This process continues until no one has anything to add to the discussion (or an agreed-upon time limit is reached).

Guiding Principles⁹⁹

Certain principles would (ideally) be followed during Fellowship sessions, and it will be useful simply to list them here:

- a. Members of the group must accept the above premises and conclusions; i.e., at least *that* much uniformity must exist within the group. They must regard each other member of the group (each other *human*, in fact) as their equal, and accept as a truism that one person's views are as worthy of expression and consideration as those of any other person in the group.
- b. Each member of the group should have an opportunity to “speak one's truth”¹⁰⁰ and, indeed, ideally all members will speak for about the same length of time during a given session. This ideal likely would never be met, however, because during a given session one or more members may not feel “led” to speak—and certainly one should not feel an obligation to speak just for the sake of speaking. On the other hand, though, if one feels very talkative during a given session, one should attempt to restrain oneself: monopolization of the talking is strongly discouraged (and should, in fact, be *prevented* by the Prophet).
- c. When one is speaking, one should feel at liberty to say what one genuinely feels “called” to say. Which is not to say, however, that one should resort to vulgarity, or impropriety in some other way (e.g., speaking in an undiplomatic manner).
 - a. When one is speaking, one should avoid criticizing others in the group, or trying to

symbolizing well the goal of a New Word Fellowship to combine unity with diversity. This latter suggestion has its origin in Gus DiZerega, [*Pagans & Christians: The Personal Spiritual Experience*](#). St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 78. Originally published in 2001.

⁹⁹Compare with Paul's comments in I Corinthians 14:29 - 32.

¹⁰⁰This principle is, of course, automatically followed by virtue of the fact that a “talking hoop” (or whatever) is used to help control discussions during the session.

- discredit what they say. One should show respect for others in the group—keeping in mind that “loving the neighbor” entails allowing others to come to their own conclusions (and choosing their own spiritual path), rather than imposing one’s own point of view on others. If one has a viewpoint that is in opposition to one that someone else has expressed, one should simply state one’s *own* (contrary) viewpoint without comment on what someone else has expressed.
- f. When one is *not* speaking, one should listen—not just be preparing one’s *own* “speech” for when it is time for one to speak again. One is expected to be (or at least *become*, with time) convinced that one does not possess the whole truth; that, rather, one is like one of the blind men feeling the elephant. So that given that one wishes to know *more* of the truth, one needs to listen attentively to others as they speak.
 - g. If discussion seems to be proceeding down a certain path “naturally,” one should not (as Prophet) try to divert it down some other path—either because one doesn’t like that path, or because one has certain notions of where the discussion *should* head, and believes one has the right to divert the discussion in that direction.
 - h. All should be aware of the danger of the group becoming too “cozy.” Thus, each person present (and not just the Prophet) should consider the possibility that at times s/he should act as a (diplomatic) “devil’s advocate” (but only when it is one’s turn to speak—unless one is the Prophet for that particular session).
 - a. There is always the possibility that some who join a given NeWFian congregation will not “fit in” well. Therefore, a congregation should decide early on in its existence how it will handle that eventuality. It might decide, e.g., that at the beginning of any meeting any member will have the right to call an Exclusion Vote. What could be done, then, is that the Bishop would distribute “ballots” to all of those present, and that those present would then write down the names of those members that they thought should be expelled from the congregation. The Bishop would then collect the ballots, count the number of names during the service, and then announce the results at the end of the service—announcing only the names (if any) of those to be expelled. The basis for expelling a member might be, e.g., that if a given name appeared at least $0.65x$ times, that person would be expelled from membership in the given congregation (where x = the number present that day).

Note that key assumptions underlying a Fellowship are that each member of the group has a unique viewpoint, that this is good, and that individual spiritual development (defined in the broadest possible sense) on the part of each member should be fostered. It seems to me that these assumptions are *inherent* in Jesus’s use of parable-telling in the (canonical) gospels—so that there is, with the New Word Fellowship, emulation of a key element of the *style* of Jesus’s “ministry” as presented in the gospels. The speaker of a parable implicitly assumes that each of his/her listeners is unique, that that is good, and that each hearer will—and should—interpret the parable in a way that is meaningful to that person; and that over time each person will find ever more meanings in a given parable. The parallel between Jesus’s use of the parable in the gospels

and use, by us moderns, of the Fellowship is not, of course, a perfect one. But I am pleased that the Fellowship has important characteristics in common with the use of parables by the Jesus of the gospels.¹⁰¹

Expected Outcomes

In this section I identify and discuss major consequences that I associate with participation in Fellowship sessions, doing so using two different approaches—first a *generic* approach (i.e., one that focuses on *types* of consequences), and then a *genetic* (i.e., *causally-oriented*) one.¹⁰² I might add here that if there is magic in ritual,¹⁰³ then so too can there be magic in “institutional furniture.”¹⁰⁴ The “magic” in a New Word Fellowship, it seems to me, lies in one’s being aware of the possible consequences associated with participation in a Fellowship. That is, if one knows in advance what effects participation in a Fellowship may have on oneself, this may increase the likelihood that participation will *have* those effects—a self-fulfilling prophecy. The point here is that humans are complex creatures, and that although it is true that the situation one finds oneself in (institutional and otherwise) likely will have some effect on one’s thinking and behavior, foreknowledge of possible consequences of participation can also impact one’s thinking and behavior.

Let me begin here by noting that University of Wisconsin-Madison philosopher [Max C. Otto](#),¹⁰⁵ in discussing his concept of “realistic idealism” years ago, gave the example of a conflict situation that was resolved amicably. The conflict involved the owners of a (gasoline) “filling

¹⁰¹One with a scientific background might say that the New Word Fellowship represents an “operationalization”—for the present, and United States society—of the approach to ministry used by Jesus centuries ago, in a different part of the world.

¹⁰²I might note here that I see Fellowship sessions as involving *ritualized* discussion, and believe that that ritualization has important—and multitudinous—consequences. Relevant here is Tom F. Driver, [The Magic of Ritual: Our Need for Liberating Rites That Transform Our Lives and Our Communities](#). HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1991. On p. 71 Driver asserts that the “major functions of ritual . . . [are] making and preserving order, fostering community, and effecting transformation.” Driver then devotes Chapter 7 to “Order” (pp. 131 - 51), Chapter 8 to “Community” (pp. 152 - 65), and Chapter 9 to “Transformation” (pp. 166 - 91).

¹⁰³Driver, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁴Thorstein Veblen, [The Theory of the Leisure Class](#). New York: Penguin Books, 1967, p. 210. Introduction by Robert Lekachman. Originally published by The Macmillan Company, 1899.

¹⁰⁵[The Human Enterprise: An Attempt to Relate Philosophy to Daily Life](#). New York: F. S. Crofts & Co., 1940. See Section vii (pp. 146 - 49) of Chapter V (“Realistic Idealism,” pp. 128 - 53).

station” in a small town who wanted to cut down some elm trees, and town residents who opposed that action. Otto noted that the conflict was resolved by a “young man,” and emphasized that this young man did not propose a *compromise*—i.e., a solution that by its very nature is one that is *accepted* by all parties concerned, but *satisfies* none of them. Rather, the young man proposed a *creative*—i.e., a higher-level—solution; a solution that not only *satisfied* both parties completely, but (thereby) *removed the acrimony* that had developed between the parties. Otto added that such solutions are not only *desirable* (obviously!), but *possible*. Unfortunately, however, Otto offered no guidelines for achieving such solutions.

I suspect, though, that Dr. Otto would approve (were he alive today), with enthusiasm, the New Word Fellowship because it is designed (for one thing) to produce creative ideas. Not that it is so *guaranteed*, of course; but creative ideas should be a common occurrence in Fellowship sessions. Creative ideas that serve to resolve conflicts, on the one hand—but other types of creative ideas as well. Also, the fact that a Fellowship fosters the achievement of creative ideas concerning which there can be a *consensus* has, in turn, various consequences—discussed below under two headings. Finally, the fact that the creative ideas achieved can be thought of as having been revealed by Deity (and undoubtedly *will* be by some participants) *itself* can have various additional consequences (also commented upon below).

Outcomes: Generic Approach

I have already made a few comments on outcomes, but below discuss them in more detail, using first a *generic* approach—doing so under three headings: intellectual, sociological, and personal. After having used that approach, I use a *genetic* one.

Intellectual

Two factors, I believe, account for the creativity that would occur during sessions (or afterward, as a result of the stimulation that occurred *during* a given session). First, those participating in a Fellowship would have certain things in common, but would also be diverse in various respects—and this mixture of uniformity and diversity would conduce creativity. A certain degree of homogeneity is needed in a group for it to function effectively as a group; but a certain degree of diversity is needed (for a discussion group) if it is to produce creative ideas and decisions.

But a certain degree of diversity is not in itself enough. Members of a Fellowship, if they are to produce creative ideas/decisions, need to interact with one another in a harmonious manner. In recognizing this fact, I have designed the Fellowship in such a way as to promote such interaction. That is, discussion in a Fellowship proceeds in a *structured* fashion, one that is institutionalized; the intent of that design is to prevent the occurrence of acrimonious exchanges, encourage honest expression of one's views, and encourage consideration of the views of others.

My hope is that the design of the Fellowship—along with variety in participants—is such as to conduce creativity. Insofar as it is discovered (through actual experience) that the Fellowship’s design is flawed so far as that goal is concerned, my hope is that the participants will become aware of those flaws, and will then act to correct them.

Insofar as one thinks of a Fellowship as having the capability of producing “good” *decisions*, one way of looking at this is that each of us is “crazy” in some way, but that if a *group* is involved in making a decision—and uses a procedure analogous to that of a Fellowship—the individual “crazinesses” will get cancelled out. At any rate, this was the theory used by the group of individuals who created “Feeling Therapy.”¹⁰⁶ (It’s good, isn’t it, that therapists—some of them, at any rate—realize that they are not completely sane! Or is it scary?!)

Sociological

Precisely because I foresee that creative ideas and decisions will emerge from Fellowship sessions, I believe that there will be sociological implications. Discussion of a given topic would be expected to proceed (usually, at any rate) until some sort of consensus is reached, and it is reasonable to expect that all (or virtually so) participants will have contributed to that consensus—and that each *knows* that s/he has. *That* fact will generate in each participant a certain degree of enthusiasm; and *that* fact, in turn—combined with the fact that all members of the group are in *agreement* about something—will help to bring the group together. In fact, I suspect that not only will a feeling of solidarity/community develop in the group as a consequence of the achievement of a creative consensus, but an *enthusiastic* such feeling.

Had other “rules of engagement” been established, members of the group may have quickly become involved in acrimonious exchanges, so that not only would no consensus emerge, but the group would not develop a sense of solidarity. In fact, the group might simply dissolve. I am hoping, however, that the Fellowship has been designed in such a way that not only will creativity be stimulated, but an intense feeling of *community* on the part of participants. Insofar as “fine tuning” is needed in the Fellowship’s design on this score, it will be done whenever needed, I would hope. Institutions seem to have a tendency to ossify; I hope, however, that the design of the Fellowship is such that “hardening of the arteries” would never occur.

Personal

There are, I believe, three types of *personal* consequences that participation in a Fellowship can have for participants. First, participants are likely to acquire certain *behavioral habits*: speaking

¹⁰⁶See Werner Karle, Lee Woldenberg, and Joseph Hart, “Feeling Therapy: Transformation in Psychotherapy,” in [Modern Therapies](#), edited by Virginia Binder, Arnold Binder, and Bernard Rimland. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1976, p. 81.

one's mind honestly and with conviction; being courteous in one's interactions with others; becoming a good listener, more prone to consider the ideas that others have to offer; and more modest in one's claims regarding what one knows. Regarding this latter point, I believe it likely that participants will, over time, come to see themselves as possessing *part* of the truth, but *just* part—so that it is wise for them to listen to what others have to say, because others *also* have part (but not all) of the truth.

Anyone who has observed people over the years will have noticed that some individuals seem to have a proclivity to try (if but unconsciously) to control¹⁰⁷ others, while other people seem to be rather passive and susceptible to control/manipulation by others—even seemingly welcoming it. These tendencies¹⁰⁸ may have, in part, a genetic basis, but both are nevertheless objectionable. Fortunately, I believe that participation in a Fellowship will help wean individuals in the first category from their tendency to be overly-assertive and domineering; and also foster in the second sort of people a greater degree of self-confidence and assertiveness. In other words, I see the Fellowship as an *equalizing* force that can counter “natural” tendencies toward hierarchy in favor of more egalitarian relationships between people.

Second, participants may develop, and be able to sustain, certain *feelings*: feeling, e.g., enthusiastic, optimistic, and energetic. And these feelings will not only mean that participants will acquire a sense of well-being as a result of their participation. In addition, they will experience improvement in their physical,¹⁰⁹ emotional, and mental health. And their high level of well-being will not only enable them to *plan* well, but *work* well in the event that they have planned some course of action involving them (or some of them) as a group.

Finally, the Fellowship experience can lead to an *altered state of consciousness* for some, if not all, participants: different people experiencing a “natural high” at different times, and for different durations. This “high” (resulting, I suspect, from the achievement of a creative consensus) will not only give one well-being, but may very well then become itself a further *source* of additional creative ideas.

But another consequence of becoming “high” is that one may begin to perceive what might be

¹⁰⁷They may perceive this as exercising “leadership,” rather. That is, they may put a positive “spin” on their objectionable behavior.

¹⁰⁸For a somewhat old, but excellent, discussion see Marilyn French, [*Beyond Power: On Women, Men, and Morals*](#). New York: Ballantine Books, 1985.

¹⁰⁹Including psychosomatic ones. On the topic of such illnesses see the old, but still fascinating, A. T. W. Simeons, [*Man's Presumptuous Brain: An Evolutionary Interpretation of Psychosomatic Disease*](#). New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1960.

termed “spirit” in the things around one, especially in other people (in which case the term “soul” would be appropriate). In so perceiving other people, one’s behavior toward them will be affected in that one will strive to be considerate and courteous toward them, even loving. And insofar as one sees spirit in the *natural* world one will attempt to refrain from doing anything that might desecrate it, including littering. The idea here is that if one perceives spirit in things, in effect one regards them as *holy*, and therefore has reverence for them; given *that*, one behaves (or strives to) toward them in a manner that will not involve harm—and may very well involve the opposite. Writer Bill McKibben has observed (in [The End of Nature](#), I believe) that he found it peculiar that Christians on the one hand claim to believe that God created the earth (along with the rest of the cosmos), but seem to feel no compunction in polluting and otherwise desecrating earth. Perhaps the explanation for this seeming paradox is that Christians tend to conceive God exclusively as a discrete *transcendent* Being, rather than as an *immanent* entity.¹¹⁰ And are too narrow-minded in their thinking to recognize that such pigeon-holing of God is (from, e.g., a Buddhist perspective¹¹¹) blasphemous.

Finally, some (e.g., me) may relate the Christian concept of a Holy Spirit with a natural high.¹¹² On the one hand, they may perceive the experience of a high as “possession” by the Holy Spirit; and if they do this, they may begin to lose the perception of God as a discrete transcendent entity

¹¹⁰Few Christians seem to understand the fact that “God” can be—and has been—conceived in a variety of ways. For an excellent recent discussion of the God concept see Daniel C. Maguire, “More People: Less Earth: The Shadow of Man-Kind,” in (pp. 1 - 63) [Ethics for a Small Planet: New Horizons on Population, Consumption, and Ecology](#), by Maguire and Larry L. Rasmussen. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1998. Dan is a Professor of Ethics at Marquette University. Also of value here is Chapter Four (“God: The Heart of Reality”) in (pp. 61 - 79) Marcus J. Borg, [The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a Life of Faith](#). HarperSanFrancisco. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc., 2003.

¹¹¹See Raymond Panikkar, “Nirvana and the Awareness of the Absolute,” in (pp. 81 - 99) *The God Experience: Essays in Hope*, edited by [Joseph P. Whelan](#), S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971.

¹¹²Charles Dickens’s [A Christmas Carol](#) and the movie [Groundhog Day](#) (starring Bill Murray) are famous examples of individuals undergoing a personal transformation—becoming Spirit-filled, one might say. In the former, Scrooge is forced to observe his life at different points in time, whereas in the latter Phil Connors is forced to live a given day over and over until he becomes a new person. Unfortunately, not only does neither of these works have much relevance for real-world people interested in achieving personal transformation. Both are naive in not realizing that societies are systems, meaning in part that there is congruence between the institutions of the society and the dominant value system associated with those “peopling” the society. Meaning further that it is foolish to expect significant values change without concomitant institutional change. I have developed a strategy for bringing about societal system change while recognizing the interrelated nature of institutions and values, but this is not the place to present that strategy.

“out there” some place. Rather, they may begin to think of God as a *Presence* (in the sense of Matthew 18:20, but referring to God rather than Jesus). On the other hand, they may perceive creative ideas they receive as “revelations” from God (perceived as a transcendent Being). Note that these two ways of relating Deity to a “high” are not necessarily in agreement, for the first clearly involves perceiving Deity as immanent in a special sense (a Presence within certain humans), whereas the second seemingly involves perceiving Deity as a discrete transcendent Being. It would seem, however, that some who think of creative ideas as having their source in Deity would also be able to conceive of Deity as immanent (in people, at least), and would thereby be able to think of their “high” as also constituting “possession” by the Holy Spirit (conceived as a Presence rather than discrete transcendent Being).

Outcomes: Genetic Approach

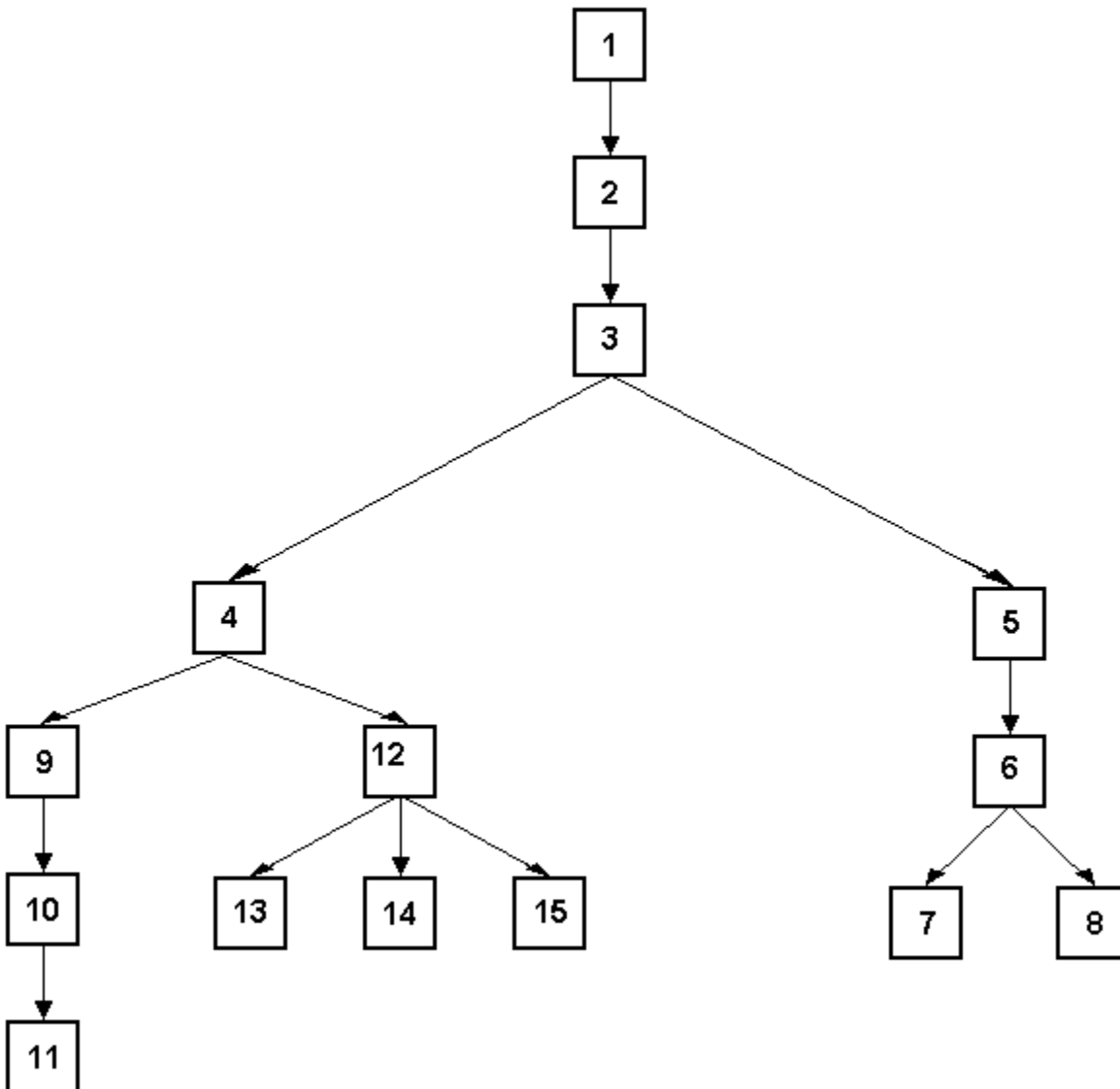
To further comment on consequences associated with Fellowship participation, let me next use a different approach (one focusing on causal relationships), basing my discussion on the following diagram (next page).

Each numbered comment below refers to the corresponding number on the diagram. The discussion that follows is intended to complement that given earlier in this section, not duplicate it. Overlap exists between the two discussions, but some important points made earlier are not repeated below; and, on the other hand, the discussion below adds some points not made above. Together, the two presentations should give the reader a fairly clear picture of the consequences that I foresee for Fellowship sessions. If I discuss only *positive* consequences, that is because that’s all I foresee!

1. During the course of a Fellowship session creative ideas (i.e., new understandings, insights, ideas regarding what certain individuals or the group might do, etc.) may be received by one or more participants. At any rate, different perspectives are likely to be presented, and the various thoughts spoken (whether or not original to the speaker) can be thought of as pieces of a puzzle.¹¹³
2. During some sessions a creative idea will occur to someone that results in putting these various pieces together to form a complete picture. This will not occur in all sessions—perhaps not even in most sessions. But it *will* occur in some sessions—especially once participants gain some experience with the Fellowship as an institution.
3. That picture—i.e., that consensus—will be recognized by each participant as a good idea—a great idea, in fact. And because each will realize that s/he has made some contribution to that consensus, all will develop a strong commitment to that consensus.

¹¹³But not pieces capable of being put together in just one way. In that respect, the analogy here is not a perfect one. (*None* are, of course!)

4. That realization will produce in at least some participants a “natural high,” an altered state of consciousness. With some having such an experience, the “high” will last only briefly; with others, it will continue for hours, even days—perhaps until the next Fellowship session. The consequences of this altered state of consciousness are discussed under points 9 - 15 below.



5. Achievement of a consensus likely will result in the development of a strong sense of solidarity, “community,” within the group. A feeling that one’s own personality has merged with the group—yet that one retains one’s distinctiveness as an individual as well.
6. Gaining a sense of Oneness with the others in the group will also result in a feeling of well-being on the part of all members of the group. That is, all will develop feelings of enthusiasm, optimism, energy, “aliveness,” a sense that one is a choice-maker in control

of one's destiny, etc. Of course, the individuals comprising the group will have different personalities, so the feelings they develop in response to the achievement of consensus will vary.

7. If the consensus reached concerns an action to be engaged in by the group as a group, the feelings of well-being and enthusiasm will ensure that the action is performed well and expeditiously.
8. The feeling of well-being engendered by the consensus achieved will contribute to the physical, emotional, and mental health of each of the participants.
9. If the achievement of a consensus by the group results in a "natural high" on the part of a given participant (it may occur to several, even all), that person's perceptions may be altered—in that the person may begin to perceive that "there is more in Heaven and Earth than is dreamt of in your philosophy" That is, the person may begin to perceive things not just as consisting of matter, but also an intangible something that might be termed "spirit." Some will limit this perception to other people; others will limit it to animate beings; still others will begin to perceive "spirit" even in inanimate things such as rock formations.
10. Insofar as one perceives "spirit" in something, one will develop a feeling of respect—even reverence—for that thing. One may even perceive it as holy—as has occurred with many mountains, including the Black Hills in South Dakota.
11. That attitude toward other things will have behavioral implications for the one with such a perception in that s/he will not consciously engage in hurtful behavior directed toward things that are respected. One may even engage in *positive* behaviors toward them, including worshipful behaviors.
12. The experience of an altered state of consciousness may affect one's conception of Deity (if one has such a conception). The conventional way of conceiving Deity in our society is as a discrete, transcendent Being given the name God. But the experience of a "high" may change one's conception of Deity—even to the extent that one no longer finds the name "God" as an adequate name for Deity. For one may, e.g., come to conclude (Buddhist-wise) that *naming* Deity is itself blasphemous!
13. One who believes in Deity may come to see the consensus reached as being a *revelation* from Deity (i.e., John's "Helper"¹¹⁴). This means that one continues to perceive Deity as a discrete, transcendent Being, but now is asserting that one does not accept the theory that the Christian Bible uniquely embodies God's revelation. With the Quakers one now "recognizes" that God is *not* dead (as the Biblicists imply), is still alive, and still reveals Truths to humans. And although one continues to think of God as a discrete, transcendent Being, one may come to think that God's *only* role in today's world is reveal

¹¹⁴See, e.g., John 14:26 and 15:26.

Truths to humans—so that, e.g., so-called “acts of God” are not such, and that the very concept of “acts of God” is blasphemous.

14. One’s “natural high” may be interpreted as “indwelling”—even “possession”—by God as Holy Spirit. Which may cause one to believe that when Paul was writing about being filled with the Holy Spirit, he was referring to what some would call a “natural high” experience. Note that in this case one is thinking of God not as a discrete, transcendent Being, but as an amorphous “ghostly” something that can be present in humans. What we have here is a “God as Presence” concept of God, a God that is *experienced* rather than a God that *does*, or has done, things (e.g., create things). Given the latter, a person who has come to conceive God as Presence is unlikely to think of God as, e.g., a *creator* of things, and is therefore likely to think of the current controversy involving the teaching of evolution as sadly misguided. That those who argue for Creationism/Intelligent Design are spiritually immature individuals whose thinking about spiritual matters utterly lacks depth.¹¹⁵
15. If one comes to perceive spirit in all (or many) things (point 9), one may (but need not) equate that spirit with Deity—so that one comes to think of Deity in terms of *immanence*. That is, one comes to think of Deity as an all-pervasive Something that “inhabits” all things. One developing such a view would not only come to have *respect* for all things, but *reverence*. And if one not merely has respect for things, but reverence, one will be even less likely to engage in harmful behavior toward them. And if one *must* kill other living things to sustain oneself, one may feel that one must perform a ceremony first, and perhaps a ceremony afterward that expresses one’s thanks. Because in this case one thinks of Deity as definitely other than a discrete, transcendent Being, one may come to conclude that any attempt to personify—or even name—Deity is blasphemous.

It is conceivable that a Fellowship participant could move into category 13, or 14, or 15. For that matter, a participant could move into categories 13 and 14, *or* 13 and 15, *or* 14 and 15—*or* even 13, 14, *and* 15. There are several possibilities here. Especially if one moves into all three categories does it become possible for one to come to believe—paradoxically—that Deity is both knowable and unknowable at the same time! This is not, note, a conclusion that one can reach in “ordinary consciousness” using common sense. It is the sort of conclusion that one can reach only if one has had certain experiences.

Despite the fact that participation in a Fellowship likely will expand one’s *concept* of God, I believe that participants will also come to *feel* close to Deity. The experience of being a participant in a Fellowship will, that is, make Deity come alive for them—rather than remaining a mere intellectual abstraction. Michael Novak once remarked that most of the people he lived among are unaware of God—and then went on to assert that the reason was that the “key

¹¹⁵Of relevance here is John F. Haught, [*Deeper Than Darwin: The Prospect for Religion in the Age of Evolution*](#). Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2003.

experiences through which God becomes real to people are, in our society, systematically blocked”¹¹⁶ Although I would not go so far as to claim that *only* by participating in a New Word Fellowship can one experience Deity in our society,¹¹⁷ I *would* assert that such participation would be spiritually fruitful for most, if not all, participants. It is undoubtedly true that “Rarely do we find a ski lift just waiting to transport us to our mountaintop experience.”¹¹⁸ A New Word Fellowship, however, is close to being a ski lift, I’m convinced!

I would even go so far as to say that participation in a Fellowship can have “salvific” implications, and not just for the various individuals participating in the Fellowship. If New Word Fellowships involve enough people in our society, this could have salvific implications for the human species—in that ideas may “come” to participants which, when acted upon, have highly significant consequences relative to humankind’s survival. This latter point is significant in that humankind’s very existence is currently being threatened by “global warming,” among other factors.¹¹⁹

Those familiar with feminist theological/religious literature will know that that literature emphasizes experience. For example, theologian Sheila D. Collins has noted (in discussing Mary Daly) that a “group of women at a Grailville theology conference,” in writing down words “which expressed for them a sense of the meaning of God in their lives,” wrote such words as energizing, empowering, grounding, being, creating, etc.¹²⁰ In other words, they thought of God in *verb* terms rather than *noun* terms. Thus, my discussion here of the New Word Fellowship

¹¹⁶“The Unawareness of God,” in *The God Experience*, edited by Joseph P. Whelan, S.J. New York: Newman Press, 1971, pp. 6, 8.

¹¹⁷L. Robert Keck has introduced “meditative prayer” as an alternate “path to the Spirit.” See his [*The Spirit of Synergy: God's Power and You*](#). Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1978. Also, Matthew Fox (*op. cit.*), in his Chapter 7 (“Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime”), refers (p. 125) to “the consciousness breakthrough that the sweat lodge is all about,” and (p. 126) hitting the wall in running. Drumming is another means to an altered state of consciousness that might be mentioned.

¹¹⁸Marraine C. Kettell, “Becoming Ourselves,” a sermon delivered at Old South Church, Boston, Massachusetts, February 26, 2006, p. 4.

¹¹⁹See, e.g., Tom Flannery, [*The Weather Makers: How Man is Changing the Climate and What it Means for Life on Earth*](#). New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2005. On p. 183 Flannery observes that it is entirely possible that before this century is over, 60% of all species now existing will be extinct! Given this possibility, our well-being as humans will be severely affected. Indeed, there is no guarantee that we humans will not be among the 60%.

¹²⁰[*A Different Heaven and Earth*](#). Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1974, p. 218.

may resonate with women more than men (who, I believe, tend to think of Deity as a person-like being—i.e., in *noun* terms). However, it seems to me that *both* men and women have narrow concepts of God, and that participation in a New Word Fellowship would help both develop a more sophisticated (if amorphous) concept of God.

It should go without saying that participation in a Fellowship would place one squarely in the Judeo-Christian tradition. George E. Tinker has noted that the imperative *metanoite*, usually translated as “repent,” is better translated as “return to God”—i.e., “recognize the divine hegemony, . . . return to the ideal relationship between Creator and the created.”¹²¹ Insofar as the key personages in the Judeo-Christian tradition have striven not only to themselves establish a close relationship with Deity, but help their fellows develop a closer relationship with Deity (and in a multi-faceted way), the New Word Fellowship is clearly in that Grand Tradition (unlike Christianity!).

Note, though, that a complex concept of “God” is associated with the New Word Fellowship (and in that respect is not unlike the Christian Bible!).¹²² In some contexts (i.e., when one senses that one has received a revelation), one may conceive “God” as a discrete, transcendent Being. In other contexts (i.e., when one is experiencing a natural high), one may not so much *think* about what “God” is like, but *experience* “God” as a Presence (which one, like Paul of Tarsus, may refer to as constituting indwelling by the Holy Spirit). And in still other contexts (i.e., when one perceives Spirit in other people and/or things), one may think of “God” as an amorphous Something that is immanent (if one invokes the God-concept at all, that is). This latter God-concept is usually given the label “pantheism;” note, however, that it is given that label by those who not only conceive God as a discrete, transcendent Being, but tacitly assume that that’s the only way “God” *can* be conceived. By, that is, narrow-minded people who, because *they* think that way, find it easy to condemn those who *don’t* think their way as atheists, and treat them as if they had never heard of the “love of neighbor” command.

From the above discussion it should be clear that those who have for some time participated in a New Word Fellowship likely would not apply the label “panentheists” to themselves. For they are likely to regard this label that as a mere intellectual construct, one created by people who ostensibly would like to “think outside the box” imposed by their transcendent view of “God” but, in not having *experienced* anything that might be labeled Deity, are unable to escape their

¹²¹“Creation as Kin: An American Indian View,” in [After Nature’s Revolt: Eco-Justice and Theology](#), edited by Dieter T. Hessel. Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992, p. 151.

¹²²I should perhaps note that Jack Miles has discovered 24 different concepts of (or at least *roles* for) God in the Hebrew Bible (i.e., our “Old Testament”). See his [God: A Biography](#). New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1995.

intellectual box.

On p. 4 of my "[Worship: An Exercise in Revisioning](#)" I introduced a graphic figure and stated that it was the "B" concept of worship that was Biblical rather than (the more conventional) "A" concept; that, in fact, the "A" concept should be thought of as not simply different from the "B" concept, but its *inverse*—its exact opposite. At this point, however, let me qualify that earlier statement by noting that although the New Word Fellowship, as an institution, on the one hand rejects—and utterly—the Servant concept of "God," this does not mean that it embraces, rather, the Master concept. As I have emphasized in this section, the Fellowship participant likely associates different concepts of Deity with different contexts. Potentially three different concepts, in fact. One might say, therefore, that Fellowship participants (some of them, at any rate) would be trinitarians, but in an unconventional way¹²³—one that actually has some *meaning* for them!

Some Additional Thoughts

My discussion of the New Word Fellowship has, it will be noticed, focused solely on the Fellowship as a discussion group, which suggests the question: Would meetings ("services") of participants in a Fellowship consist just of discussions? And my answer is that although discussions (following the procedures outline above) would be the heart of meetings, NeWFian services might very well include much more than that: it is up to participants in a given NeWFian group to decide for themselves what (if anything) should take place during services besides discussions.

It is certainly possible, for example, that members of a given such group would engage in certain collective activities prior to discussion sessions. (Recall that any given discussion group would contain about 12 people, so that if a given NeWFian group had, say, 144 members, and all members were present on a given meeting day, those members would divide into 12 Fellowships that day.) For example, a period might be devoted to announcements, another to music (but instrumental music only, as I stated earlier), another to readings, still others to rituals developed by and for that group, etc. And after discussion sessions had concluded, there might be a period for socializing, with refreshments. While activities were going on for the adults there would be infant/child care, and some sort of educational program for school-age children. Again, I am simply trying to be suggestive here; any given NeWFian "congregation" would make its own decisions as to the nature of its "services."

¹²³For an example of the level of inanity to which conventional discussions of the trinity can descend, see Adelle Banks (of Religion News Service), "In Gender Debate, Jesus is 'Subordinate,'" *Christian Century*, Vol. 124, no. 4 (February 20, 2007), pp. 12 - 13.

This fact of "congregational" autonomy does not mean that different NeWFian groups in the same area might not maintain contact one with another to share ideas, etc.—that, in fact, a “denomination” of sorts might not even develop. That, i.e., an umbrella organization might be formed that would, e.g., serve as a resource center for a group of NeWFian congregations—with a “bureaucracy” becoming attached to such a center. A control hierarchy would not, however, develop, given that members of any given congregation would prize diversity, and lack a pathological need to dictate to others how to think and act.

The fact that those attracted to NeWFism would, of necessity, be people who welcomed diversity in the others with whom they had contact (and that participation in Fellowships would itself help people become tolerant) does not mean that conflicts would never arise in a given NeWFian congregation. I would hope, however, that members of any given congregation would be able to deal well with internal conflict, and in most cases be able to resolve whatever problems had arisen. The fact of the matter, however, is that people differ in intelligence, in the degree to which they are mentally ill, in their experiences, etc., so that cases will arise where resolution of conflicts is not possible. In that case what I hope would happen is that a member who does not “fit in” would not simply leave the Fellowship, but leave it and form another congregation. For there can't be too many NeWFian congregations!

But will NeWFism be able to compete in the current “religious market” wherein the megachurches seem to be the “fittest” churches around? In answering this question, let me begin by noting that several decades ago sociologist Philip E. Slater suggested that there are “three human desires that are deeply and uniquely frustrated by American culture:

- (1) The desire for *community*—the wish to live in trust and fraternal cooperation with one’s fellows in a total and visible collective entity.
- (2) The desire for *engagement*—the wish to come directly to grips with social and interpersonal problems and to confront on equal terms an environment which is not composed of ego-extensions.
- (3) The desire for *dependence*—the wish to share responsibility for the control of one’s impulses and the direction of one’s life.”¹²⁴

I’m not so sure that I agree with Slater's third “desire,” but would add to his list that many in our society recognize that they have certain talents, would like to develop those talents, but also feel the pressures of “career”—and are therefore forced to suppress such a desire. I believe that the success of the megachurches has little to do with the “conservative” theology that they expound,

¹²⁴ [*The Pursuit of Loneliness: American Culture at the Breaking Point*](#). Boston: Beacon Press, 1970, p. 5. I am in awe of the brilliance of this book.

and much to do with the fact that they recognize (if but implicitly) that there are unmet desires “out there” (especially in suburbia), and have designed programs designed to “minister” to those unmet desires. In fact, some of those who have initiated megachurches have consciously used marketing techniques—as if they were selling cereal, not Jesus! Indeed, as one who has been inspired by the Grand Tradition implicit in the (Christian) Bible, I have difficulty perceiving just how these megachurches relate to that Grand Tradition!

I have no difficulty in seeing NeWFian congregations as a part of that Tradition, however. More pertinent for the present topic of “success,” however, is the fact that I believe that NeWFism can address well the needs and desires of the contemporary USan (i.e., citizen of the United States). One must, of course, have a sincere interest in spiritual matters to become a Fellowship participant (a quality that may be lacking in many of those attracted to megachurches). And one must have the mental flexibility to be able to “think outside the box,” so far as one’s ideas of “proper” services are concerned. Having studied the phenomenon of the diffusion of innovations, I know that the early stages of development are likely to involve “slow going” for any “NeWFian movement.” However, once such a movement would achieve a certain “critical mass,” there is the potential that it would begin to “take off,” and become a significant force within U.S. society (among other societies).

The final point I would like to make is that I do not expect participants in Fellowships to just engage in talking. Rather, I expect varying sorts of activities (“outreach” and other) to occur on the part of NeWFians, each congregation making its own decisions on this matter—and with a “central office” (if one is established) acting as a resource.¹²⁵ For given that the “love of neighbor” command would be a central one for NeWFians, of necessity would members be “activists.” In fact the motto of any particular Fellowship should be: “Yes, I *am* my brother’s keeper!”

Because of the potential benefits—individual and societal—that can result from participation in a New Word Fellowship, I am hopeful that some of those who become aware of the proposal advanced herein will find it not only attractive, but compellingly so; and because they are also in substantial agreement with the Biblical basis that I provide for the proposal, feel “led” to “pick up the ball, and go with it.” That would not only make me happy; doing so by a number of people—and soon—might very well be the key to humankind’s “salvation”¹²⁶ from the threat of

¹²⁵For example, I would hope that NeWFians would recognize that our society must—and beginning yesterday!—move decidedly in a “green” direction, and would begin acting on that belief. See, e.g., Ernest Callenbach, [*Ecotopia*](#). New York: Bantam Books, 1981.

¹²⁶The term “salvation” is usually used in conjunction with the afterlife. Here, however, I use the term in a more Biblical (i.e., here-and-now) sense, e.g., as it is used in the book of Psalms. For example, in Psalms 22 (which begins “My God, my God, why have you abandoned me?”) we find (vs. 19, 20): “Oh

global ecocatastrophe. For humans would thereby be partnering with God—and as has been said (Matthew 19:26), with God, all things are possible.

Appendix

Group Formation

The Bishop is in charge of group formation. The chart below indicates how this would be done, depending on the number of participants on any given day. The first column indicates the number of participants present (exclusive of the Bishop), the other columns the number in each group that is formed that day. The first person chosen for a given group is the group's Prophet for the day. After all groups have been formed, the Bishop joins the last group.

| No. | Group 1 | Group 2 | Group 3 | Group 4 | Group 5 |
|------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| 1 | 1 | | | | |
| 2 | 2 | | | | |
| 3 | 3 | | | | |
| 4 | 4 | | | | |
| 5 | 5 | | | | |
| 6 | 6 | | | | |
| 7 | 7 | | | | |
| 8 | 8 | | | | |
| 9 | 9 | | | | |
| 10 | 10 | | | | |
| 11 | 11 | | | | |
| 12 | 12 | | | | |
| 13 | 13 | | | | |
| 14 | 14 | | | | |
| 15 | 15 | | | | |
| 16 | 8 | 8 | | | |
| 17 | 9 | 8 | | | |

LORD, don't stay away from me! Come quickly to my rescue! Save me from the sword; save my life from these dogs." The salvation needed when that Psalm was written was from the wrath of enemies; today, our enemy is global warming.

| | | | | | |
|----|----|----|----|----|----|
| 18 | 9 | 9 | | | |
| 19 | 10 | 9 | | | |
| 20 | 10 | 10 | | | |
| 21 | 11 | 10 | | | |
| 22 | 11 | 11 | | | |
| 23 | 12 | 11 | | | |
| 24 | 8 | 8 | 8 | | |
| 25 | 9 | 8 | 8 | | |
| 26 | 9 | 9 | 8 | | |
| 27 | 9 | 9 | 9 | | |
| 28 | 10 | 9 | 9 | | |
| 29 | 10 | 10 | 9 | | |
| 30 | 10 | 10 | 10 | | |
| 31 | 11 | 10 | 10 | | |
| 32 | 11 | 11 | 10 | | |
| 33 | 11 | 11 | 11 | | |
| 34 | 12 | 12 | 12 | | |
| 35 | 13 | 12 | 12 | | |
| 36 | 9 | 9 | 9 | 9 | |
| 37 | 10 | 9 | 9 | 9 | |
| 38 | 10 | 10 | 9 | 9 | |
| 39 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 | |
| 40 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | |
| 41 | 11 | 10 | 10 | 10 | |
| 42 | 11 | 11 | 10 | 10 | |
| 43 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 10 | |
| 44 | 11 | 11 | 11 | 11 | |
| 45 | 12 | 11 | 11 | 11 | |
| 46 | 12 | 12 | 11 | 11 | |
| 47 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 11 | |
| 48 | 12 | 12 | 12 | 12 | |
| 49 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 9 |
| 50 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 | 10 |

Etc.

Part IV: Conclusions

Section 8. Conclusion: “Always Reforming”

Those of us who are heirs of the Protestant Reformation have supposedly been guided by the motto “Always reforming”—meaning that we are constantly on the lookout for ways to introduce improvements in our religions. Given, however, that we have allowed clergy and related professionals to define for us what is, and is not, acceptable “reform,” the reforms instituted have—Surprise! Surprise!—been ones that clergy and related professionals have been able to live with. Such reforms have, then, unsurprisingly had at least two problems:

- They serve the interests of clergy and professionals *at the expense of the laity*.
- They have not been “in tune” with societal and “situational” changes that have occurred over time.

One of my motives for writing this eBook is the hypocrisy—or is it ignorance?—that I have observed in Christian churches over the years. Here’s but one example: In an email that I received recently from a member of the clergy, there was a story, the commentary on which (written by the sender of the email, I assume) contained the following:

Do people mistake you for Jesus?

That's our destiny, is it not? To be so much like Jesus that people cannot tell the difference as we live and interact with a world that is blind to His love, life and grace.

If we claim to know Him [i.e., Jesus], we should live, walk and act as He would. Knowing Him is more than simply quoting scripture and going to church. It's actually living the Word as life unfolds day today.

My response to you, pastor, is: If you really *believed* this, you would realize that church “services,” as currently organized/constituted, do not *conduce* the development of an intellectual commitment to this goal; nor do they put one in a “high” that would *enable* one to engage in such behavior as a matter of course. You say one thing, but are too ignorant—or is it unintelligent?—to realize that if you are to get desired behavior from us, you must *structure* “services” so that they *conduce* such behavior.

As to the term “situational changes” that I used above, I mean especially that our churches have not confronted, in any meaningful way, the ominous threat currently being posed by global warming (see Section 6 above). In 1907 sociologist [E. A. Ross declared](#) that we need an annual supplement to the Decalogue; had this suggestion been taken seriously back then, it’s entirely conceivable that we would not now be confronted with the problem of global warming.

But we *are*, and only a fool would [argue otherwise](#) (unless the individual is so lacking in integrity that s/he is willing to take money from the [fossil fuel interests](#) to deny, or at least ignore, the problem). In Section 4 above I discussed this problem in detail, and identified what I regard as the best answer to the problem (insofar as there *is* one!)—that of starting to create a New Society, with cooperative eco-communities as its “building blocks.” I would add that the NeWF (discussed in Part II) could be an important vehicle for initiating this process (or “project”!).

At this point it might be useful to add that I perceive NeWFism as having the following characteristics:

- NeWFism is not centered on the person of Jesus—or any other person, for that matter. During NeWF discussions it’s likely that reference will be made to various individuals, past and/or present, but what a NeWF is “about” is *structured interaction*, not Jesus or any other personage.
- No belief system is associated with a NeWF. As a consequence, a given NeWF may contain theists, atheists—and even those for whom the question of whether or not there is a god(s) is simply not of interest.
- Any rituals that a NeWF would have would be ones chosen by those who participate in the NeWF.
- No prayers would be offered—for prayers might offend some participants.
- A NeWF would have no Holy Book (e.g., the Bible).¹²⁷ Sources of authority for participants would be science, the Holy Spirit (for those who believe that there is such a being), “gut feelings,” etc.
- No singing would occur—because most singing involves lyrics, and lyrics often involve theological statements with which only some participants might agree. Instrumental music, however, might be played during meetings—if the members of a given NeWFian group so desire.
- NeWFian meetings would consist of two parts—reflecting the fact that the ideal size of a NeWF is about 12 people, but that a given NeWFian “*congregation*” might consist of dozens, even hundreds, of members. One part would be the *general* part, the other the *specific* part.

¹²⁷ April 7, 2013: I agree with Gus DiZerega, who has written: “Sacred texts have a special appeal to people seeking certainty without responsibility, morality without understanding, and truth without humility.” And: “Sacred texts interpose the words of others between ourselves and the Sacred.” [Pagans and Christians](#): *The Personal Spiritual Experience*. St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 2004, p. 159.

Once members of a given congregation had assembled, and assume that Congregation X consists of 110 members, all of whom are present on a given meeting day (whenever that happens to be), as people enter, the “Bishop” would have each write his/her name on a small slip of paper, and deposit it in a container (such as a Green Bay Packers cap!¹²⁸). After some preliminaries, the Bishop would draw 12 slips of paper from the container, those individuals forming Group A for the day, with the first name drawn being designated Leader (or Prophet, or whatever). The Bishop would continue this procedure to form Groups B – G, with Groups H and I different from the other groups only in having 13 members rather than 12. The congregation will have provided private spaces that would accommodate at least 9 groups, and each of the 9 groups thusly formed would go to their designated areas, and proceed with their NeWFian sessions.

NeWFian sessions would cease after about an hour, with the Bishop then ringing a bell¹²⁹ to indicate that it was now time for the congregation to meet as a congregation—which they would then do. During this congregational portion of the meeting there might be announcements, special presentations (such as short lectures, special instrumental music, etc.), etc., and following this there might very well be a time for socializing.

From this description, it should be clear that NeWFism is a rather different religion, and for that reason might have a fair amount of appeal at this time—when we are facing the serious problem of global warming, and have a society with a population that is much more diverse than it was, e.g., a century ago.

I have no problem stating that NeWFism was inspired in part as a result of my exposure, over the years, to the New Testament: Given that I have been associated with Protestant churches through most of my life to this point, it was virtually *inevitable* that if I were to create a new religion, it would reflect my past experiences.

Also, however, I recognize with Nicholas Wade that “New religions can only emerge out of old ones,”¹³⁰ so that it’s *fortunate* that I was raised in Christianity: That fact enables me to *relate* to others who are, and/or have been, associated with that religion, and to assure them that becoming a NeWFian is really just “taking the next step” in one’s spiritual life—a step that can have important consequences for one’s children and grandchildren, given the threat being currently posed to our species by global warming.

¹²⁸ OK, I’ll admit, I’m more provincial than I’d like to admit!

¹²⁹ Or use some other procedure to alert those present that it was time to terminate the NeWFian meetings.

¹³⁰ [*The Faith Instinct: How Religion Evolved and Why It Endures*](#). New York: The Penguin Press, 2009, p. 283.

Finally, although NeWFism is—as I attempted to demonstrate—a religion that was at least *inspired* by the Christian New Testament, I am pleased by the fact that NeWFism is rather “generic” in character. *That* fact may help make the new religion attractive to those who either (a) have backgrounds in a religion other than Christianity, or (b) completely lack a religious background, and are attracted to the fact that no dogmas are associated with NeWFism.

A final point: In advocating the creation of NeWFism, I am not just advocating the creation of another religion. Rather, I am advocating the creation of a religion with certain clear purposes in mind—contributing to the well-being of participants and those with whom they interact, and helping ensure that our species does go the way of the dinosaurs. It *may*, of course, do so, but we must do what we can to prevent that from occurring.

There may be a better solution to the problem of global warming than the one that I am suggesting here—(a) creating NeWFs, and (b) using them as vehicles for creating a New Society (with the eco-community as its “building block”—but *if* there is, I am not aware of it.